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A FATALIST AT WAR



RUDOLF BINDING  
A FATALIST AT WAR

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY

IAN F. D. MORROW

BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

1929

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title "Aus dem Kriege"*

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## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

OWING to ill-health the Translator was compelled to accept the collaboration of two friends—Captain Raymond Johnes and C. D. R. Lumby, Esq.—in the work of preparing this translation. While a great part of the work has been theirs, any errors either of interpretation or of style must be ascribed to the Translator.

The Translator desires to express publicly his warm sense of the obligation he is under to these two gentlemen for their friendly and invaluable assistance, without which the translation could not have been completed.

I. F. D. M.

LONDON

*April 1928*

231204





## PREFACE

THESE sketches resist any effort to work them up, to collate or elaborate them. In recognition of their documentary value and to conserve their spontaneity, they have not been altered from the form in which they were originally written during the War.

The author took the field with one of the Jungdeutschland divisions in October 1914. In August 1916 he was appointed A.D.C. on the Staff of one of the new divisions then being formed. He did not take part in the retreat at the end of the War as he was in a hospital at home in consequence of a serious illness.



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

It is hard to write from banishment, for such the experience of this War may seem to many who take it really seriously. By this I wish to express the distance that separates us from our country, our home, the feelings of our dear ones, and our previous experiences; for in ourselves we may say that the War has not removed us nearly so far from Peace as it might be expected to—none of us. When I look deeply into it, it seems somehow another world from which there is no return—not only for those whose bodies are buried, but perhaps for no one. To do justice to this other world a new speech would have to be born. We would have to learn it, you would never understand it. This is what makes it so difficult to write. More and more we are to be counted among the dead, among the estranged—because the greatness of the occurrence estranges and separates us—rather than among the banished whose return is possible.

WEST FLANDERS

*June 13, 1916*



# A FATALIST AT WAR

## SHOCK AND CRYSTALLIZATION

*October 15, 1914*

I AM passing through an enemy country; I am without news. It is well to be out of touch with home; then one can trust oneself and one's luck entirely.

*October 15, 1914*

So I am to be without news of you to-day, Ascension Day. I have not forgotten it even here, as the date on Orders for my unit brings it to my notice. How often as we rode through this Flemish land, rich and yet forlorn, with blown-up bridges, closed windows and doors, railed-in châteaux and farms, empty drives passing by me, did I think of turning round in my saddle towards the east, where everything was veiled in pale grey? I might have done it, but I did not.

I am riding in front of my corps and my division. A squadron is a very small thing. There is nothing to be seen of the enemy as yet. We heard the thunder of guns until late at night on a flank, but I cannot localize it. Everyone capable of bearing arms seems to have left the country and is invisible at present. But we will see as soon as the pioneers have thrown a bridge over the river with the delightful name. The inhabitants are quiet and friendly. Large, very clever proclamations announce that large bodies of German troops would be crossing the country—that no one would be harmed so long as they behaved peaceably. And so it is—not a shot is fired, not a house is burned down; how long will it last? . . .

Even so, it is a curious sensation to be riding alone right in front, with a few troopers forward as a point. When you think of it there may be someone behind every hedge who may shoot one down if one comes near enough to his rifle. One thinks of this for a moment, then it becomes a matter of fact. The country is very close, full of hedges and bushes

between fields and enclosures; bushes along the roads, and lanes lined on both sides with high hedges.

A subaltern has been applied for, for my troop, but there aren't any; so one carries on alone for the present. There are a thousand things that one would like to write down; they seem unforgettable, and yet they will be forgotten to-morrow because some fresh experience will have taken their place.

DEN PAUW, *October 17, 1914*

As a cavalryman one asks Nature daily why man is not born with breeches on; for one never takes them off. For many days and weeks they have been growing on us as the thick fur on the horses these October days, which are already very cool. On the straw behind the horses at night in the barns is the softest, the best, and the cleanest place in this advance, and indeed the most intimate. The space rises high in the gloom. There is a pungent, clean smell of heaped-up straw. Every lamp is out. The officers and the men still listen to the drowsy, soothing sound that horses make when eating. They snuffle softly into the oats which are warming slowly in the nose-bags, and munch and munch unceasingly. Now and then a little stamping, muffled by the straw; now and then a soft rustling where the men lie; now and then a deep, tired breath: then everything is still. The horses lie down with a contented grunt and do not move for hours. The troops, young and care-free, sleep like lead. But the officer's imagination does not let him sleep. Not so soon, however much he would like to. It is curious that one's thoughts seldom go back to father and brothers, one's friends, one's country, and one's home! They are all so well looked after; they are all perfectly safe, of course. But I think of the patrol that has been sent far out towards the enemy, led by my young friend, into the unknown and uncertain fortunes of the night. Will the horses manage it, and will the men? The infantry seem to have boundless faith in the cavalry for running to and fro, bringing in reports, on outpost duty and scouting. The horses are not of the best—in many cases they are farm-horses, not

badly bred, but quite untrained, often taken from the plough right on to the road to be ridden. On the last day before our move into enemy country I requisitioned a dozen very decently bred horses which for the most part had never had a rider on their backs. Long marches are good schooling for new horses. To-day they carry on like the old ones. But the outpost Commander knows nothing of my cares.

Will the patrol do it? Will the horses hold out?

It is three in the morning. A loud knocking at the barn door. "Yes! who is that?" "Sergeant with orders from division." The barn door rolls back, and in the dark blue gap stands the burly figure of a man who ignores the very meaning of fatigue. A lantern is hung on his breast. He steps in. The dragoons lying on the ground beside me move a little to one side. He kneels in the straw, and as he reads out Orders beginning with the information about the enemy brought in by the last of my patrols, I look up on the map the many names I have never heard before which concern to-morrow's reconnaissance and operations. Then come my orders for the squadron, which the sergeant, rising automatically, repeats. A click of spurs and the blue gap closes. The dark space once again looms to uncertain heights above me.

Then sleep comes; for now everything has been thought over and the time to advance set. There are three good hours yet. We will make the most of them.

But I awake once more. An unforgettable picture stands before me, in which the lightest and the sootiest brown of Rembrandt's colours mingle. The men are watering the horses. A shallow tub stands in the deep straw; horses heads linger in it, their necks stretched, sucking in the water quietly and steadily. The men stand by patiently, as if in the presence of something holy. One of them is in the full light, the other is lost in shadow. So the truth appears once again that the simplest things are the most affecting. This watering of the horses is no longer war, neither abroad nor at home, neither friend nor foe—here were horses drinking, here were men watering them.



The morning came. Saddle, mount, *walk*—*march*. Towards the enemy.

*October 19, 1914, morning*

The patrols are coming in bit by bit, all scattered. Their reports are credible. The most important is that they have all come upon advancing regular troops; that they have been fired on everywhere—one man fell, one N.C.O. had his horse shot under him; that there was an Etat-Major (Corps Staff) in Langemarck; a resourceful young volunteer from Frankfurt, whom I had brought along on my own responsibility, brought in the news that English troops were near us. I rode with him to Divisional Headquarters. "Scattered troops from Antwerp," opined the G.S.O.1 casually, while fighting is already beginning up in front. If the volunteer's report is right, and I don't doubt that it is, if we don't find that the scattered troops from Antwerp that they expect are not in front of us, we may have a rough passage. We are very upset over the casual way in which this report has been received.

*October 21, 1914*

Baptism of fire for three days of all sorts. We are up against English and French troops. A very tough fight, because, although we outnumber them, we are hampered by the lack of planes. So the gun positions of the enemy cannot be spotted and we have to endure their fire without replying to it.

The fact that the enemy is near makes the villagers dangerous as well. I was fired on quite unpleasantly from some houses. The prescribed procedure in this event—to burn the houses in question—is nonsense, increasing the confusion and the resistance, and almost always strikes the innocent. I had two men shot whom I found in two houses from which we were fired on. This had the required effect.

Great confusion. Supplies already broken down. We are so hungry that we pinch everything we can see. The pig that just now ran across the road is recognizable as a roast in the evening. We don't dare to bring the front-line transport



forward. Horses are standing in the open ready saddled all night through. Behind them bundles of straw pulled down wastefully from the stacks make comfortable beds.

The battle continues. Fierce night encounters. A grandiose horizon of burning. Clouds like sections of agate.

We halted for some time, dismounted along a wall—the whole squadron. On the other side of the street there was a little wayside chapel such as are common in this part of the country, empty and unused. My trumpeter asked whether he should take the horses inside, his and mine, evidently thinking that they would be safer there. First I said yes, then for some reason or another no, so he stood outside with the horses. In a few minutes a heavy English shrapnel shell broke through the back of the shrine and burst in the middle. If the trumpeter and I had been in the chapel there would have been nothing left of us or the horses. Only one ball got the trumpeter's unfortunate horse and killed it. The trumpeter looked at me strangely as if I were the Lord God.

*October 22, 1914*

It was hottest just in front of the cross-roads of the high ride on October 19th. The infantry was stuck. The Divisional Staff, which it was my duty to protect, was much too far up, right among the enemy's musketry fire. The projectiles were continually cracking on the little house by the road, which was just as hard to reach from the rear as it was from the front. On the road in the ditches troops moving forward; to the rear, wounded, stretchers, blood, sweat, exhaustion. A man came into the little house, wild-eyed and streaming with blood. "Ain't there no water here?" A pitcher was standing there, but we had to refuse him. "We need it ourselves," was the reply. "Go farther back." I sent one of my men to put him on his way. Casualties were left lying on their stretchers in the ditches. Through the door of a corridor I could see the old, white-headed Captain of the light infantry battalion lying on the ground, bleeding profusely. Half an hour ago he had passed me, leading his men forward cheerily. He leaned

against a corpse to prop himself up and look out up the road after his lads, who, crouching in the ditches, were creeping forward.

*October 23, 1914*

Slow progress, if it can be called progress. Naturally the smallest success is noted with satisfaction, but a setback is not shouted from the house-tops. Already the place has become a waste. Fire and death are everywhere. Empty, plundered farms; graves with a helmet stuck on them, the mounds often built up with the hands out of the solid clammy clay. The wounded often lie for days, for fighting goes on to and fro by night as well as by day. Of course there is still oats for the horses in the farmhouses, but precious little for the men. We have no oil for the lamps, no lights, no salt, no bread. The dragoons managed to make a potato soup; it was delicious because we were so hungry.

*October 24, 1914*

We have been cut off for so long from communications from the rear that the smallest thing is hailed as manna from Heaven. Yesterday the squadron supply cart ventured up as far as some dead ground in the village, and I had some bread and meat brought up on wheelbarrows during the night. This was regarded as a return to normal conditions.

*October 25, 1914*

There is nothing to be done with cavalry here at present. We are lying much too far up, and it is pure luck that we have not been badly knocked about. To calm our nerves I baptized my slightly damaged farm "The Whistling Projectory." The shells whistle over us incessantly. The horses stand beneath thick willows alternating with high poplars, and the shells are not meant for us at present, but for the guns behind us. This bombardment no longer worries us at all.

My men wanted to raise a bed for me, but the only one that could be found was, by some special decree of Providence,

untouchable, for in it lay a heavy English shell which had pierced the wall of the house and the ceiling without bursting and had gone to bed on the mattress. This dangerous sleeper had to be respected.

PASSCHENDAELE, WEST FLANDERS, *October 27, 1914*

When one sees the wasting, burning villages and towns, plundered cellars and attics in which the troops have pulled everything to pieces in the blind instinct of self-preservation, dead or half-starved animals, cattle bellowing in the sugar-beet fields, and then corpses, corpses, and corpses, streams of wounded one after another—then everything becomes senseless, a lunacy, a horrible bad joke of peoples and their history, an endless reproach to mankind, a negation of all civilization, killing all belief in the capacity of mankind and men for progress, a desecration of what is holy, so that one feels that all human beginnings are doomed in this war.

I have just read that the splendid von S. has been killed. You know my friendship for him, his house, his pleasant wife, who was so fond of her horses. He was a friend to so many, a helper to many too. And now he is only one of thousands who died with him. It is very hard to keep one's end up against all this. But those who are in the field and those who are at home must make a special effort mutually to help each other to hold out. Then the rest, the personal, becomes smaller. It is good, it is well, that personal matters should seem small and that one should experience it.

We will probably lie here for a few days more. The battle, which has lasted nine times twenty-four hours without effecting a decision, has immobilized both Fronts close to one another. Now forces will be massed for the attack. Our Army has Ypres as its objective. There is no doubt that the English and French troops would already have been beaten by trained troops. But these young fellows we have, only just trained, are too helpless, particularly when the officers have been killed. Our light infantry battalion, almost all Marburg students, the best troops we have as regards musketry, have

suffered terribly from enemy shell-fire. In the next division, just such young souls, the intellectual flower of Germany, went singing into an attack on Langemarck, just as vain and just as costly.

*End of October, 1914*

This is the thirteenth day of uninterrupted fighting at the same place. It was only on the first two days that we had something to show for our daily losses—indeed, it seems to be the case along the whole line from Belfort to the sea. I can see no strategy in this manner of conducting operations. Each of the countless divisions, like ours, is allotted a definite sector. It has to be held without consideration for the character of the ground and the inner strength of the troops, and is held to the point of senselessness. This, of course, ensures the continuity of the front, but not the smallest possible losses; and this, together with the greatest possible success, is what we should strive for. All I can see in this method is the last degree of clumsiness and lack of imagination. What does it mean that all the divisions are really doing nothing besides keeping their direction?

This manner of leaving the lie of the land out of consideration in keeping direction and not considering the quality of the troops both show themselves in our divisions. The country is difficult, and was not properly reconnoitred beforehand as it should have been. The troops themselves are young and are overcome by the first too powerful impression—numbed by thirteen days and nights of fighting in primitive trenches for ever falling in, weakened by continual fire and deprived of their leaders.

The news that I get from home makes me speak out; the time, the matter in hand and fatality, do not allow one to give out the whole of one's personality; one must retain enough in oneself for a breath of fresh air.

Everything on the front is rooted to the same spot. I don't call it a success when a trench, a few hundred prisoners, are taken. They have always cost more blood than they are

worth. The war has got stuck into a gigantic siege on both sides. The whole front is one endless fortified trench. Neither side has the force to make a decisive push.

This proves that generalship is lacking. Genius looks different, and shows itself otherwise than through what we see everywhere.

When one reads the paper one must take the mean between the German and the French reports. I would not assert that they are lying; but reports change their aspect on the way from the place where they happened to the columns of the Press. We have been having magical days here full of the spiritual quality of the autumn. Warm, fine, sunny, tempered with fine gold. The moonlit nights are wonderful, but everywhere and always their beautiful tranquillity is broken by the growl of heavy guns, the crack of rapid rifle fire from the attacking and defending trenches. So it is on the twentieth night.

At last I got an officer for my unit to-day. If there were only something real to be done now.

Behind us the peasants wander back slowly to their farms so far as they are still standing, but there is no return to Passchendaele. The ruin here is indescribable. The houses are torn from top to bottom; they overhang, they are still falling in; the paving of the streets is in the houses; the roads are pitted with the craters of burst shells; roofs lie in the street; cobble-stones lie in the beds with the window sashes they brought in with them; a lake of beer has flowed from the broken vats of the brewery into the cellars—one can see it through a sieve of arches. Not a pillar in the church is unbroken; I saw the tower fall in one piece across the market-place. A great bloated cloud of yellow dust arose from the market-place as if the dust itself bore a banner. In a living-room was a dead horse with half its entrails trailing over the yellow silk chairs and cushions; I cannot guess how it got in there.

The autumn days are still mild and sunny, which is the best thing one can wish for man and beast as long as possible;



but the sun is the enemy of our troops, as it does not pierce the fog till late in the day; for then our westward front is quite blinded by the setting sun, and at the same time is a well-laid target for the enemy, so we get daily a regular evening blessing of shrapnel and H.E. shells over the neighbourhood. There are always some victims. The French artillery fires even on a single horseman. Last evening I rode to the battle headquarters of a General with one of my officers. I had just halted a moment to ask a question of a passing man—at once one of the beastly things burst so close that it splashed our boots with mud; they even followed us at a round gallop for quite a way.

*November 2, 1914*

Everyone is getting ready for a winter campaign. As far as I can judge there is no possibility of an early finish. The problems of the end are too great for that.

*November 6, 1914*

The return to the elementary and the primitive has ceased. The doctor has salvaged the last thing that could be saved from the shot-up fragments and well-combed remains of Passchendaele—a small bath-tub. This rich article is the envy of higher staffs. The Divisional Commander invites himself to a bath. The great kettle has been hanging over the fire the whole afternoon warming bath water. Magnificent! The bath is in the yard; rank is ignored in the queue; the General bathes after my clerk. This afternoon I rode to Roulers with the doctor, who is a man of resource. The inhabitants have already come back here, although the town is well within gun range of the enemy. In a butcher's shop in a side street there are still a few sausages. A pretty girl was standing in the background—butcher's daughters are always pretty in the background. Another shop had three tins of mushrooms, one tin of sardines, and some more or less rancid salad oil. At the finish I rode away with a respectable basketful of purchases in one hand and my reins in the other. On the way we struck a farm with turkeys. I arranged to swop a turkey for a loaf

of bread which a dragoon would bring to-morrow. The farmer is as pleased over his loaf of bread as we are over the turkey. I also succeeded in negotiating a supply of milk with one of the inhabitants. A farm is burnt down; the cows are still there, but will not let themselves be caught for milking. That is, only one of them. The others were used to the sister. The sister was killed by a shell.

Coffee is coffee, the soldiers think. They mixed some fragrant coffee which arrived as a gift from home for the officers with some greasy looted stuff which tastes like cardboard. The cardboard won. "One makes an egg," said Field-Marshal Von der Goltz, who came here from Brussels in a car for a short time yesterday, "and one forces the enemy to surrender." The expression is cheering! The yoke of the egg is Ypres. We are at the pointed end; but the egg stoutly refuses to be surrounded.

*November 8, 1914*

We are still stuck here for perfectly good reasons; one might as well say for perfectly bad reasons.

*Beginning of November, 1914*

What destinies must be buried here! I pass the ruins of a house every day in which I took shelter with a few men and horses during the first days of the attack. At that time it was evident that the inhabitants had just left the farm. Only two very old people who could not be brought away sat rigid and immovable on either side of the dying fire in the grate. The two sat there like fixtures of the house, like things that had always been there and always in the same place. Whether spoken to or not they did not utter a word. My men built up the fire and used the fireplace daily. They did not stir.

As we had enough to do to look after ourselves we forgot them entirely. I don't think that anyone gave them anything to eat or drink. On the third night I noticed a hunch-backed, stupid, and ill-formed young female in the darkness of the

room, who stoked the embers carefully and furtively, and attended to the old people. I discovered that this creature belonged to the household and had fled to somewhere in the rear. She ventured to come only at night, looked after the two old people and, after making up the fire, left without a word. I never saw her in the daytime. A few mornings later the squadron moved billets, so I left this house. Although we came back in the evening to the same neighbourhood after a totally unsuccessful search, I did not occupy it again. The next day I went there on foot. The two old people sat motionless on their seats as before, the fire had burned down and was glimmering between them. A cricket which had taken shelter behind the warm hearth from the coming winter made childish, intimate music, as if to say it is good to be here. But it attracts no one. The next morning the house was burnt down, destroyed by enemy fire. The two old people disappeared. I do not know whether they are dead or alive or who might have brought them away. It is bright now over the dark hearth open to the sky. The cricket still chirps his care-free song among the warm stones of the hearth. But he, too, will be silent to-morrow.

*November 10, 1914*

War is a strange business. No one has really known it, and its methods of teaching are cruel, rough, and primitive. Human methods seem foolish and clumsy—in fact, offensively theatrical compared with them. I can see in front of me the General who commands one of our brigades. He received a report that a small garrison was holding us up and firing busily from the white château—any old shed, the simplest kind of house, as long as it is not a peasant's habitation, is called a château here. He raised his arm with the gesture of a great commander and cried from his horse, pointing forward like a conqueror of the world, "Lay fire to the castle!" which seemed to settle the matter as far as he was concerned. He behaved in the same sensible manner—and thought he was doing the right thing, I am sure—when he was snowed under with reports, when



his troops were having the hottest time, when they were in the most dire need of calm, clear orders, when everything depended on his doing something decisive, and he cried to his Brigade Major in a state of terrific excitement, "The horses, my dear L. Come, let us fling ourselves into the battle!"

PASSCHENDAELE, *November 13, 1914*

Even though the situation is favourable on the whole as it seems, one gets fed up with the length of the operations. The troops are getting naturally more undisciplined than they were after their training. The cold weather makes them susceptible to illness. The senselessness and greed of the people round the transport and field kitchens, which are more attractive than the places where there is shooting, is already perfectly disgusting. Bad weather, eating unripe fruit from doubtful vendors, without any real hunger, for as they are perfectly well fed it is quite unnecessary that they should do so. On the other hand, the forward positions cannot always get hot soup from the field kitchens even at night. Continual downpour. Storms from the west proclaim that winter has arrived.

Unfortunately everyone does not seem to be possessed of patience. The Corps and Army Commanders see that others in other parts have obtained tangible successes—so they thirst for laurels too. It is a human weakness, but they think it is a virtue not to lag behind the others, and do not realize that this virtue must be paid for in blood.

*November 16, 1914*

Cold storms, snowflakes that make the horses shake their heads with annoyance, warn us that we must get ready for cold weather.

Winter quarters are being built. Yesterday we installed a stove. It is very humorous to see what curious things the dragoons seem to find desirable in a house, and what they can raise when they are put to it. They often bring in perfectly useless stuff and leave important things in the ruined houses, where they are generally knocked to pieces or trodden into

the dirt. We acquired a hanging lamp to-day. Furthermore, the dragoons endeavoured to please me by bringing me a china boy with "Blankenberghe" written on his stomach. He is leaning on a basket that can with some difficulty be used as an ash-tray. The men think it an appropriate *objet d'art* for an officer's winter quarters.

This low-built cottage is not uncomfortable. The air pressure caused by the detonation of the guns has broken all the windows; we try to keep the cold from blowing in with paper and rags. The courtyard is higher than the floor, and cannot be navigated without the huge poplar-wood sabots which lie like a fleet at anchor near the door. A small room adjoining the kitchen is thickly carpeted with straw. A few N.C.O.'s sleep there, while my one subaltern and I have a couple of mattresses in a little room beyond. No bed-clothes, but still comparatively yielding. We pull off our boots, wrap ourselves up in two blankets, roll up our cloaks under our heads, and even if one gets up in the night to follow the fortunes of infantry fighting one manages quite well with the sabots.

The remainder of the N.C.O.'s sleep in the kitchen—that is to say, the room where the fire originally was, and which in these houses lies in the middle and serves as an entrance hall as well. I know my way about now. When I want to go across the courtyard at night to see from the entrance across to Passchendaele and the enemy positions where the fiery jaws are gaping, I have to step over the trumpeter first; he does not move, nor do the others. Then come Dörr and Lips Klapp and Büttel. Sergeant Holl lies near the door at right-angles to them like a faithful watch-dog. Nobody can pass over him unperceived, and he hears me though I call ever so softly. On the other side cyclists attached to my unit occupy a room together. All the troopers sleep with the horses, even the four first-year students from Bonn—Hussars König, Willmanns, Kiel, Ooms. I write their names in order to follow what becomes of them afterwards—if there is any afterwards.

Two neighbouring farms are also occupied, and such is my kingdom.

*Middle November, 1914*

"The evening blessing" is less dangerous in the fields, as hardly a shell bursts on contact, but is imprisoned by the soft, sticky mud.

To-day, for the first time, it is quieter on the Front. The trenches, filled with icy water, do not encourage one to reinforce the slender garrisons with which both friend and foe are holding the line. Companies had been withdrawn to reserve dug-outs—in fact, many of them have been taken out of the line for a rest for the first time. Both parties are in the same situation.

This business may last for a long time.

*To . . .*

*UDENARDE, November 1914*

I am down the line for a few days with a detachment of my men to requisition horses. This is carried out regularly by estimating the value of the animals and paying for them. Some of the owners are very pleased, other less so. The horses are mostly middling good, sometimes magnificent heavy stuff, but not exactly troop horses. I keep in touch with the Front as regularly as possible. The town is one of those that are half or three-quarters dead, very like Bruges. It only vegetates, but there is still hidden riches among the families from far-off times—a state of affairs that does not exist in Germany.

You tell me that you and others are working in soup kitchens. What you observe and reflect on may be more useful to you than the occupation itself. It may be conducive to thought. Of course, a better class of people are coming in daily. A sense of responsibility is growing, and it is good that it should be so. A big war cannot be settled so simply as would appear to be possible in the opinion of many who stayed at home, and who are really trying to relieve themselves of the weight of things.

Christmas will soon be here. But it is taking a long time to convince everybody that we shall not be at home for it. Over in Paris they will be thinking of their armies in the field as invincible, as we think of ours. How are we to get a peace out of that? It will go on to the last drop of blood.

PASSCHENDAELE, *November 21, 1914*

One should allow no man and no power to take the pleasure of existence from one; one should give no one that pleasure who on his side finds pleasure in doing so. Thank God, man was made by Nature to stand on his hind-legs. This should always be remembered, if anyone or anything seeks to force us to our knees. The same applies to you women. If one still has a head on one's shoulders it cannot be too difficult to walk upright.

I dashed back, or rather forward, from Oudenarde yesterday—rather a forced march. It was on account of Lüttich, my mare. A little shell-splinter wound had got very bad. Apparently a tiny bit of steel cut its way in deep and disappeared without being noticed. The result was suppuration, high fever, and severe pains; the poor animal was bathed in sweat day and night. I will ride far for a good horse. I almost thought she was invulnerable; but I suppose she is mortal, just like the rest of us.

We have at last evacuated everything that looks like a native; they are all banished to the lines of communication. Therefore the cattle are running wild about here. We have started a herd of animals which we slaughter according to our needs. There are plenty of cattle about still, even without counting the human kind. Unfortunately none of us is very good at milking cows. They must have had a special process here. But although the cows will not give up their milk, we have rather too much than too little of other things.

*November 25, 1914*

Mankind shows a singular lack of imagination. All the roads, large and small, are paved in this country, for the

excellent reason that the earth is so soft that an unmade or even an unpaved road would sink into the ground. On these made and cobbled roads between the fields three-wheeled carts without shafts are used; for the draught animals cannot go one step off the road into the fields at this time of year without sinking. These three-wheeled carts can be turned on the spot as the draught animals turn straight round without having to leave the road or make a wide turn. He goes along beside the cart which turns on its hind-wheels and, turning about, follows him. This natural wisdom, sprung from the soil centuries ago, could not penetrate the imagination of German officers of high rank. Hence a Divisional Order which probably came from a much higher formation and affects other divisions as well: "The three-wheeled carts used in this country will be provided with shafts, in order that they may be steered better." As a result of the introduction of this gadget—to the horror of my sergeant, I said that we would not carry this order out for the present—the carts were possibly easier to steer. But one could see everywhere that where a cart had been turned on a narrow track, or where one had pulled aside to let another pass, horses had sunk up to their bellies in the fields. After they had been released from the shaft it took hours of work to get them back on to the road. The order was countermanded a few weeks later. But the point is that it was issued in the first place.

PASSCHENDAELE, *November 27, 1914*

We have now been stuck in the same spot for five weeks. For five weeks the newspapers have been saying that Ypres is to be the decision of this phase of the war, at least. This may have been right a few weeks ago—but a decision depends also on the time taken to effect it. Now, this part of the Front is losing the character of a decisive sector. The action here as a whole is no success as far as Ypres is concerned. What we have gained in ground and the enemy's losses, however great, can only be called a success by a man who does not see



both sides. For, apart from the fact that our losses have probably balanced those of the enemy, no one can possibly estimate at present what this breathing space of five weeks may mean for France and England. We may be stuck for good and all.

A terrific struggle is going on for the cross-roads at Broodseinde, south-west of Passchendaele. Generals and Colonels are flirting with the idea that to take the cross-roads of Broodseinde may mean something in the history of the world. Every day a few houses at the cross-roads are stormed; every day we or the enemy, according to who happens to be in possession, is thrown out again. Neither we nor the enemy seem to be capable of forbearing to take it unless we can hold it. This bickering over cross-roads, however important they may be, is too small a job for an army; I would say that every man sacrificed at it, on whichever side, is wasted. As regards sacrifices, it is true that, with the exception of the above-mentioned butchery, the leaders were only reckless at first, perhaps with the false appreciation of that Staff Officer who, when an enemy headquarters was reported to him, saw only scattered troops from Antwerp. Now the losses are often the fault of the men. Our men do not trouble their heads over the fact that only picked snipers are firing from the enemy's line—men who, at a range of often less than a hundred yards, cannot help hitting every head that shows itself. It is not contempt of death that makes them expose themselves to certain death; it is lack of discipline. Precise instructions and orders on the subject have been drawn up; but they are not observed. One officer said the other day, by way of excuse, that it was exactly the same in 1870. I replied: "All the worse!"

Reserves, ammunition and supply columns, behave in the same irresponsible manner. In childish simplicity they expose themselves in transport parks and column of route, in perfect order, just as if there were no 'planes to report their position to the enemy gunners. What, then, is the use of other Commanders taking infinite trouble—very rightly—to conceal

their vehicles by fitting them into a wood, a hedge or a tobacco plantation, or by covering them entirely with branches?

As matters stand now, not only here but all along the line, both we and the enemy have so crippled ourselves by infighting that we cannot get in a blow properly, we cannot get the momentum for a thrust; we get in our own way with every movement of any importance. Once again I observe that, here at least, the art of war is not noticeable. It may be an incredible achievement to create this endless, unbroken line from the Alps to the sea as a monstrous whole; but it is not my idea of strategy. . . .

Only a month ago this country might have been called rich; there were cattle and pigs in plenty. Now it is empty; not a wine-cellar in any town that has not been requisitioned for the Germans. Not a grocer, corn-chandler, or dairy but must sell their goods to the Germans only. We have taken every horse, every car; all the petrol, all the railway-trucks, all the houses, coal, paraffin, and electricity, have been devoted to our exclusive use. I buy all the necessities and comforts I want for myself and my man, give the shopman a requisition order signed by myself, and he bows me out. I take fifteen bottles of the best claret and a few of old port from the cellars of Chevalier van der B—they only drink wine and milk in this country and gin in the pubs—and do not even tip the butler two franks. I take the oats and straw, the pigs, cattle, chickens, vegetables, tinned fruit, potatoes, and apples that belong to the inhabitants who have fled or been evacuated. They do not even get a chit to give them any formal right to claim. Whom could I give it to?

If we were making rapid progress and there were problems to be solved that claimed one's whole energy one might not think backwards so much. As it is the horizon is bounded in front as with a mighty wall that neither deeds nor thoughts can surmount, and only behind us can we see a little patch of blue sky.

November 30, 1914

The west wind that is blowing to-day is enough to blow you off your horse; it is oceanic—a thing that those living inland cannot understand. This morning I rode to the new farms that have been allotted to us as winter quarters. There seems to be quite a lot of traffic along the roads. The farms that we are to occupy have naturally a great deal more style about them than the château of Monsieur de G., which was supposed to be my billet and which I have been glad to relinquish to some unimportant Headquarters. An old peasant woman, short and stout and wearing those delightful sabots, stood in the doorway, through which one could see other doors opening through into the length of the room. On the floor, in great squares of black and white, lay the geometry of chiaroscuro in divers tones; the walls were quaintly tiled. The typical picture of the lesser Dutch painters stood before me, with all its intimate lighting effects and properties. The old woman was messing about with butter and milk-tubs, things that were a complete mystery to us. I shall engage a cleanly wench from a neighbouring farm as cook.

PASSCHENDAELE, December 2, 1914

We have resigned ourselves to the idea that it will take the artillery at least another month to break down the enemy's position. Then comes a feeling of superfluity, of uselessness, of dullness. One thinks of getting away for a week, to see one's friends and cheer up. Already each one thinks that he can be dispensed with.

As far as the situation is concerned, exactly what I predicted has come to pass: Ypres will *not* be the decisive battle of the campaign. Doubtless a decision was to have been effected; the orders and utterances of G.H.Q. are perfectly clear on that point; but this plan has failed. Instead of confessing this frankly—for it is nothing to be ashamed of—we allow the world in general and the troops in particular to contemplate this threat of war in the expectation of a big action. But there is no action—particularly no big action.



It is true that such is not to be expected here. It would only lead to greater losses, and they are great enough already. The division had not been a month in the field before all the infantry regiments had lost more than half their effectives—the Jaeger battalion lost three-quarters. In fact, it had ceased to exist for a time; then it was made up again.

“Winter Quarters” is written plainly now. All units except those in the very front line are bringing up their second-line transport. Of course, this shows how safe we feel ourselves—we would not dare to do it otherwise; but it shows also that we have renounced our freedom of manœuvre and therefore that we expect a long period of stagnation.

DRYWEGE, *December 8, 1914*

Well, we have finished our move. We only realize what filth we have been wallowing in now that a fairly clean table, a decent farm bed, and other acquisitions seem to us something rare and extraordinary. I found out when we moved that the unit had *won* a very considerable assortment of things that had to be trailed along when we moved billets. A number of cattle, conspicuous by the number of lean, old cows—several underfed pigs. The transport wagons, piled high with fodder for the horses, the farrier’s cart, chestfuls of newly arrived clothing, not forgetting forty chickens in home-made coops, all sorts of lamps and gadgets, the last of the vegetables, and the coffee-mill; surmounted by the bath-tub and followed by a pack of adventurous tripe-hounds, belonging to no race at all; these were gently driven along by tickling them with lance-points and kept on the road by careful troopers—for they would have been drowned in the ditches. So this caravan found its way to the new home.

It seems strange to see inhabited farms, cultivated fields with a few cattle, carts full of sugar-beet, and especially men, women, and children. There was none of all that in Passchen-daele.

It seems strange also not to hear the nervous chatter of

musketry day and night, but only the deep growl of the heavy guns in the distance; for we are now quite six to seven kilometres behind the front line.

Just as strange it is, too, to lie between two coarse linen sheets of rustic weave every night; to take a real shirt out of one's box; to get out of one's breeches in order to be more comfortable and to put on a fresh tunic. Up to the present the opposite course was at the same time more comfortable—and safer.

Strange, again, to have a hired lass who speaks half German and half Flemish to wait at the mess-table and keep Headquarters billet in order—who wields real clean dish-cloths. These and other things, such as glasses, knives and forks, clothes-hooks, writing materials, and sundry household necessities were obtained from the neighbouring town of Rousselaere.

Things that are a matter of course in ordinary life have become so new and strange; we have to learn manners over again. True, Captain R. still wipes his knife on the tablecloth and leaves a river of soup across the tablecloth when he fills his plate; but I am gradually curing him of it and at the same time curing myself of not noticing such things. These manners were a sort of adaptation to our surroundings in the filth of our former billets.

Of course cavalry as an arm has less to do than ever. Apart from the fighting there is nothing at all to be done. I cannot even ride across a field or a pasture; one sinks immediately. Sadder and wiser one returns to the strip of churned mud that was once a road, if one ventures to try a strip of grass between the fields that looked a bit more solid than the rest.

In order to control the growing indiscipline caused by inactivity we mount guards—as if there were something to be guarded; we have all sorts of duties in the afternoon and spend the rest of the time feeling superfluous.

So this is where I shall spend Christmas. I feel almost as though I would have to get my feelings into working order

beforehand to make them respond at all—like winding up a watch to make it go. For truly . . . there is no longer any sense in this business. The fraternization that has been going on between our trenches and those of the enemy, when friend and foe alike go to fetch straw from the same rick to protect them from cold and rain and to have some sort of bedding to lie on—and never a shot is fired; this is a symptom of reason that only goes to prove the converse: that there is no longer any sense in this business.

DRYWEGE, *December 10, 1914*

We are sitting in the dark—that is, as near as makes no difference. To-day twenty-five liters of paraffin were issued for the whole division—say, for five thousand men. About the best you can do with it is to use it as a perfume on your handkerchief, and this otherwise lowly mineral oil is valued as the spikenard of an Egyptian princess. We care little whether an '88 Margaux is to be found in a château; what we want to find in the cellar is a barrel of petroleum. The few candles that I had kept tucked away at the bottom of my box have been used to the last whiff of grease.

DRYWEGE, *December 13, 1914*

Nothing important happens. If there had not been three hundred—indispensable—prisoners and a number of casualties in a small attack yesterday there would have been nothing doing at all. Hence an Order of the Day from Corps H.Q. that finished up with "Hurrah!" and bestrewed thirty Iron Crosses—quite forgetting that we have to mourn the loss of three capital ships, *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau*, and *Leipzig*, and that the other smaller ships of Count von Spee's squadron will soon go. Now can England once again proclaim to the world that the seas are at last definitely clear of the German pirates and that nothing more stands in the way of transports bearing war supplies from overseas to France.

But we shout hurray over three hundred prisoners!

DRYWEGE, *December 19, 1914*

It will be, indeed, a strange Christmas that is coming; I imagine that you, too, will have a strange festival at home. Perhaps the great justification of celebrating this Feast of Peace in war-time at all will not occur. Insuperable contradictions seem to me like changing dreams at night. One does not come to consciousness of sense or nonsense—neither can one master the sense or nonsense of all that happens in these times.

DRYWEGE, *About this time*

I often feel as if the war had killed mistress, father and sisters, and all the past within me. Nothing bears any relation to it, nothing connects with it, nothing fits it. Everything is meaningless compared with it. Or it is meaningless itself; and that would be unbearable.

One cannot live in the war unless one has said to peace, as to another world, *Vale!* Otherwise one cannot be a soldier, or so it seems to me. Many are suffering from the inability to say good-bye to that other world. And those that can will not do so without horror.

Perhaps Peace will bring about a resurrection of the dead—I do not doubt that it will—but all that has been belongs to another world, a quite unjustifiable world that one dismisses lightly, as a dream

*To his Father*

DRYWEGE, *December 20, 1914*

If I had my way some person in authority would proclaim that Christmas will not be celebrated this year. I cannot attain to the lack of imagination necessary to celebrate Christmas in the face of the enemy, however well-meaning such thoughtlessness may be. My reflections hang me up.

The human mind and human sentiment have the gift of piling themselves up gaily on derelicts without noticing it. What an achievement it would be if the war were to sweep away all this wreckage, if Humanity could bring its own

feelings to meet that which has come to it from somewhere, at some time from someone—if we could make our own Festival of Peace—if Peace upon Earth could be expressed otherwise than in terms of sausages and *pâté de foie*, of little bottles of Schnapps, bad cigars, family groups, Jewish engagements, and such-like piffle . . . !

The simplicity of Christmas, with the laughter of children, surprises, the joy of giving little things; this is as it should be when it appears alone. But when it enters the lists with a war it is out of place. Enemy, Death, and a Christmas-tree—they cannot live so close together.

December 21, 1914

We got word of the retirement of the Russians along the whole line yesterday. The *communiqué* closed with the words: "All the bells are ringing in Berlin." I asked myself why the bells should get going while there were still so many Russians about; and this final flourish seemed to me to be both irrelevant and in bad taste. But one cannot express this. I, too, am glad that the Russians are giving way; but I would rather hear, instead of the jangle of bells in Berlin, the words: "The enemy is being pursued"; "We are pursuing the enemy"; or, "We are on the heels of the enemy." I don't suppose that the pealing of bells affected them in the least; I am sure that they took no more notice of it than I did.

December 22, 1914

It is not easy for anyone, this time—as I thought . . . I know men who actually congratulate themselves on being in the front line on Christmas Eve—so-called—instead of confronting the half-untruth of the Christmas-tree. This Christmas-gift stunt, organized by novelty-mongering, snobbish busybodies in a glare of publicity, creates such an unsavoury impression here that it fairly makes one sick. The fact that they make their appearance with a thousand packages of bad cigars, indifferent chocolate, and woollies of problematical usefulness, sitting in a car, seems to make them



think that they have a right to have the war shown to them like a leather factory. The fact that there are men who are very much disinclined to say pleasant things to them, because the loss of their last son may have induced them to a rather serious view on the beastliness of the war, does not affect them at all; *Liebesgabe* gives them licence for their shameless behaviour.

Our Divisional Commander lost his second son—his last—only the other day. He was killed in a neighbouring division. Now this unhappy father is expected to keep his head and lead his troops and forget that when he returns home he has an old age bereaved of his children to look forward to, and that he will be honoured only by memories of the War. He must not think of the poor women at home who has been brought to the brink of despair by the War that is his daily work.

DRYWEGE, *December 27, 1914*

Winter on one hand, and defensive strategy along the endless line on the other, have condemned us to an almost intolerable state of uselessness: we wait in the antechamber of His Majesty the War, who deigns to make us wait. So we wait till he calls. But it is not as if he said: "I shall not need you until the water before you has run away"; he makes us sit, fully dressed, in the anteroom, thinking of how we will carry out his orders—holding out stiffly so long as the remains of nerves will let us.

Such is the winter campaign—standing in readiness like a picquet. And this lying fallow of capable brains is worse than the lazy undisciplined loafing of great masses of troops, of army reserves, of cavalry condemned to inactivity, of transport and supply columns. They all get slack. Of course, they get a little rusty—sometimes more than they should—yet inactivity means to them, not a loss of life, but boredom, ease, and loafing. However, those others in their midst do not dare to ease off and feel a sort of poison creeping into their systems.

It oozes in. The General Staff Office are not resting, but feel themselves unfulfilled. Immobility leads to nervousness, to a feeling of weakness that does not really exist. They lose confidence—they know too much about the shortcomings of their own troops. They pay too much attention to insignificant things that surround them. Public opinion, decorations, visits of kings and princes—as if that sort of thing mattered hereabouts.

As far as the mixing up of public opinion with the War is concerned there is hardly any difference in style and tone between our *communiqués*—for the Western Front at least—and those of the French, which take public opinion most unduly into consideration. They have not the courage to keep silent over a period of days as they had at the beginning of the War. They feel that they must be reassuring; and effect the very reverse through the smallness of the news. We give a faithful account of every bit of trench and every handful of prisoners we have taken, and pass over in silence every bit of trench and handful of prisoners we have lost—just like our adversary. As if it all mattered in the very least—as if there were any place for such stuff in a war *communiqué*! These details have their place in the war diaries of companies, or, at the most, of battalions—but not in the daily reports of an army.

It seems that we cannot get rid of our old-time mimicry of the foreigner; so much so that the style of our *communiqués* gradually approaches that of the French—in fact, becomes identical. “We made a little progress,” “We gained some ground”; all the vague *clichés* that we used to smile at contemptuously are now to be found in our own reports; and these have no idea that they have been copied from the French.

The public was being very well educated at the beginning of the War; now it is being spoilt. The authorities had even managed to wean it from its taste for snappy paragraphs of news, and to focus its attention on the stark greatness and simplicity of events. Now, the war *communiqué* is edited like a voluminous local paper; the only thing that is lacking is a column of “communicated” items, which would really be the

proper term for the little snippets of news out of company war diaries, telling of their successes and minor deeds of heroism.

Orders and decorations have something fine about them when they are granted for real merit. But these distinctions lose their value when they are dished out like the insignia of a club. The feeling that a man can only gain distinction by himself has got lost. These people are happy when they are selected for distinction; and the less they have done to deserve it the happier they are. The greed of certain elements for orders and decorations is enough to make one sick. The tradition of a manly breast smothered in medal-ribbons goes hand in hand with that of the "Christian Soldier," which is really the only one that matters; at the same time, the Christian ruler is not at all displeased if the dog of a Turk furnishes him with some fairly useful comrades in arms. And new decorations are cropping up all the time; all the smallest princelings are creating fresh pots for their loving subjects to hunt. I have not yet managed to appreciate what difference there is between Prussian valour and Oldenburg valour; or how the latter may be distinguished from the Hessian or Anhalt brand. To those who know the only real war decoration will be the Iron Cross, First Class, and only if worn by a Captain, Subaltern, N.C.O., or Private.

Now, when Battalion and Company, Group and Battery Commanders learn how plentifully the Iron Cross has been sown in supply columns, offices and Headquarters, they find themselves in the painful necessity of having to hunt Iron Crosses for their own troops, who have seen real fighting and therefore—rightly or wrongly—attach more value to the distinction.

It will soon come to be a competition as to who can get the highest average of Iron Crosses; in fact, it has come to that already.

On this point the War has not made the German any greater. He remains a snapper-up of outward honours. I would venture to dub his quest for honour "Souveniring."



It is a bitter pill to swallow for those who have really won their Cross for heroic conduct under fire.

*New Year's Eve, 1914*

The year is drawing to its close. It has been a grave year for all of us, who, in spite of all earnestness and deep thought, must admit to ourselves that we cannot realize what the War means. Does it not seem to be a monstrous folly, that mankind with drawn sword is weltering in a massacre before which it will some day stand aghast, like Ajax among the slaughtered sheep?

We must not give way to such thoughts; they are concerned solely with outward and visible symptoms without grasping their inner meaning. Perhaps the immeasurable result of all these atrocities, this destruction, this soul-killing brutality will be to bear a new Thos and a new Pathos for the world, as the new clean flesh strives upward towards the light from the depths of a suppurating wound. What if—I will try to render the two words I have just used, more or less, in German—what if a new valuation of the worth of mankind and a new appreciation of the destiny of man should be born in each of us—perhaps in only a few at first—as a gigantic Good to compensate us for a monstrous Evil?

That would be enough; it would recompense us for all that the War has done to us. Without this hope I feel that it would be unbearable.

But I did not intend to speak of such matters to-day. The days of the changing year demand lighter thoughts, even from us who belong to the seriousness of the Front—these days devoted by ancient custom to lighthearted enjoyment and the promise of a fairer prospect at every New Year. A sort of New Year's philosophy is permeating my being, rising up like the steam of the punch that we will brew on New Year's Eve, in spite of the immanence of the foe and of Death—thanks to you at home.

All systems of philosophy can be contested—but not New Year's philosophy. For it is formless as the drift of steam that

arises from the punch-glass; it brings me into a strange frame of mind. The world seems to become more simple; philosophy comes easy to the soldier, for most of his surroundings are quite unproblematical. Most problems disappear entirely, others remain.

I cannot fathom the reason for it; but it seems that War Correspondents and hunters of war sensations are, of all mankind, the most exposed to shell-fire and all the dangers of war. At least, this is what I gather from the papers. It is incredible, yet one must believe on reading their reports, what an inborn characteristic of their person or species it seems to be, to draw shell-fire on themselves wherever they go. The range of the enemy batteries increases by at least three kilometres as soon as they appear. I thought at first that they were confusing gunfire with the sound of the guns, and believed themselves to be exposed to fire when they were in fact only exposed to sound. Then I imagined that the thunder of the guns had some painful effect on them; that they were, in a manner of speaking, thunderstruck. Nature affords parallel cases; I remember that the cat draws in her tail as if it had been stepped on during a thunderstorm, and that she half-closes her eyes to show that she suffers from tummy-ache. So it is possible, thought I, that the thunder of guns hits them in the belly; but I have been forced to abandon this theory. Experience proves, in spite of numerous exceptions, that the above-mentioned category of human beings are more exposed to hostile shell-fire than we are, and at longer ranges.

And when I come to think of ourselves I notice many strangely silent folk amongst us. These are the men who have taken part in attacks and have lain under fire for hours and days—not like those who write about it in the newspapers. One meets a little dried-up Captain with a kindly nose, rather too large for him, and grey-blue eyes that seize and hold objects like those of a sparrowhawk. He sits in silence, seems to be cold, and sticks his hands together in his sleeves as in a muff. He is one of those who have been under fire in deadly earnest; and when he is warm at last and throws open his

coat you may see that he wears the Iron Cross, First Class, on his breast, beneath his heart. If you are in luck and he happens to be in the mood you may hear something. How he lay right up forward with his company—nothing to the left, nothing to the right, and nothing behind them. Yet they had orders to hold the trench. Then came the shells. Slowly searching they came, until one got the range; and there was no longer any trench in that spot, only a ragged crater. This was on the outer flank. Then came shell after shell, eating their way nearer and nearer. The men had to lie down; they had their orders that the trench must be held. Yet another ragged crater, not far from the first one. He sent back a message: "Is no support coming up, to the right or the left, or behind me?" No support came; the reserves had been used up. But a fresh order came that the line was to be held at all costs. So they lay still.

"Can't we retire, Herr Hauptmann?" asked one of them who had never in his life made such a request before.

"No."

And so they lay there, waiting for the next shell; calculating that their trench was getting shorter and shorter and that they would soon be without any cover at all; but there they lay—lay until the night came. There was not much left of the trench; but there was a chance to breathe. Then came another day—with the searching shells; then another night; and then—reliefs.

The little Captain said nothing about the casualties. I could see that a picture inside his mind was keeping him from speaking. After a while he spoke again:

"Heavy shells fly so slowly. One can hear them coming—a long way off. We had to keep lying down."

That was all he had to say about the fire of heavy artillery. And once again I realized that experience makes one silent, or, at least, sparing of words.

The history of this War will never be written. Those who could write it will remain silent. Those who write it have not experienced it.

That sounds blasphemous, I exclaimed to myself, as the Spirit of New Year's Philosophy dictated these words to me. Yet my nasty imagination told me that they must be true.

*January 2, 1915*

Not one of the belligerent Powers and not one of their men have as yet developed a technique of modern warfare—unless it is Hindenburg. To impress one's particular stamp on a war—Napoleonic, Hannibalic, Moltke-esque, or Cæsarian—that would constitute a style. The first grand attack on the Western Front was more of an elemental shock of two gigantic forces in rapid motion and had nothing of the style of war. A certain duration of the action, a certain repetition, a selected speed, is essential to that. Every blow of Hindenburg's Army shows the impress of the same mark. One recognizes him in every one of his thrusts, as one might know a knight, close-visored, by the way he bears his lance.

But whose style have we to show in the West? Of course, I do not speak of the Germans alone. Neither have the French nor the English produced a man who imprints his personality on this War. One cannot deny that the hedgehog shows a certain originality in his manner of self-defence—but one cannot discover any particular signs of genius.

The French and the English lack even that elementary and convincing quality that we showed at the beginning, in default of a style; at any rate, it was imposing.

Our first advance had a style that could be perceived. But it seems probable that it was conceived and planned by one who is now dead, or who is not on the spot to carry on the style.

*To . . .*

*Same date*

. . . and now that I look up once more and, prompted by your quest for scattered riches, think of Peace—I had not thought of it for a long time—I see the New Year standing

before me. This time we will not change the old for the new, like a servant that we dismiss; no one would be satisfied. It would seem that we all need the New Year—even the War needs it. War in particular seems to lose dignity when it becomes an accepted daily occurrence. Would a constant thunderstorm, an earthquake as a normal condition, a massacre as a common event, impress us as matters gravely affecting our destiny? Apart from a transient feeling of disgust, we would become quite callous. Certainly I admire this War, admire it as an unprecedented event; but I do not want it to shave and brush its teeth before me every day. For then it betrays too many of the characteristics of peace and ordinary life, to which it bears no relation. One forgets that it is holy; one gets into the frame of mind of the sacristan who shuffles about the church in his shabby slippers all day, forgetful of the Divine Presence enthroned there.

I cannot say that the War bores me; but it does not know what to do with itself. When I read the things that are written about it, I somehow feel that there is something lacking in its inward self.

And then all becomes clear: It is we men who have made the War; and we are ignorant of it, and cannot discern its shape.

DRYWEGE, *January 4, 1915*

Bruges, the Dead City, presents a strange spectacle as a German garrison town. At twelve o'clock each day (German time) a naval band plays in the market-place. German march tunes break upon the sharp pinnacles of the Belfry; the great square and the stony streets are full of soldiers who throng the shops, try to turn some cafés into German inns, and do their best to banish peaceful Death from the town. But the quiet quais, the Béguinage, the little squares and lanes, are as dead and quiet as ever. Now and then a German officer appears, showing such a lack of understanding and reverence that I really feel happy to think that there is nothing of this kind in Halle or Bitterfeld, or wherever he may have come from. The



Memlings and Michelangelo's *Madonna* are missing from their places—*en sécurité*, as they say.

I took S. and Dr. E. along with me; thus I managed to avoid for one day the drivel of the third officer of my small H.Q.; this was a pleasure in itself, enhanced by the enjoyment of the delicious town. We ate some cheap oysters, drank a bottle of St-Marceaux, and then contemplated the rare beauties of the town in the right mood. Soothed by the silence of departed years, we wandered about feeling at peace with all the world—by the little antique shop with the two pretty daughters, the fish-market with its many fruits of the sea, the narrow passages and sudden vistas—forgetting the War without an effort. The weather was almost fine—a rare occurrence at this time of the year.

For the weather here deserves a word all to itself; I had no idea that so much rain could be hung on to one solitary sky.

BRUSSELS, *January 10, 1915*

My horse and I took a toss the other day and I broke a tooth. So I am here under medical treatment.

The town, which I had never visited before, is magnificent in the true sense of the word. The site is ordained by Nature to be the fit and appropriate setting for a city. The relation between the upper and the nether city is singularly fitting. As a prospect, more could have been made of St-Gudule. The market-place is typical of the character of the city—piled-up riches, a jumble of self-assertive, different styles, that get along very happily together, of all periods, yet preserving their individuality; very mercantile, savouring of gold and pomp, rather snobbish, and rather too much gold about.

I was in St-Gudule this morning; a priestling read out a horribly long *document précieux*, as he called it, from the bishop; it was anti-German propaganda, political clap-trap of the first water, and exceedingly dull. I was the only officer in the church.

With its German garrison, German sentries at the Royal Palace, German officials in the Post Office, German railway

guards, and von der Goltz's bright lads of the Jungdeutschland in the streets, feeling very soldierly with their smart turned-up hats with the brown cockade and saluting vigorously, the town is very strange—an experience in itself. The happy-go-lucky citizens count themselves lucky, in a way, not to know how the War is getting on. *Il faut attendre*, and they wait. Waiting is tiresome, and one must kill time somehow. So one kills it. This is, roughly speaking, the train of thought of the Boulevards.

Billets in the hotels are free; everything else has to be paid for. The prices in the pubs. are fairly stiff. As everyone is dependent on them two categories come into Conflict: The economical German Captain, who never goes out in the ordinary way, and does not like to spend money; he complains that there is no boots in the hotel, and, when he is referred to the night-porter instead, finds the latter's help much too expensive. On the other side, we have the subaltern, for whom nothing is too dear. A few Bavarian officers' wives are here on a visit to their husbands; a few old Colonels stride about with hunched-up shoulders and riding-whips, showing that they have spent most of their lives in strained relations with a horse.

I shall be going back to the Front in a few days. I confess to myself that I am uneasy about it.

*Same place, same date*

Many things are, indeed, puzzling. One can possibly find a reason for calling those uninteresting German biscuits "Leibniz-Keks." But we have a brand of sardines, enclosed in bluish metal tins and differing in no wise from the ordinary kind, that bears the name "Guillaume Tell." After long reflection, it occurred to me the Tell in question must have been a sardine-fisher on the Lake of the Four Cantons.

DRYWEGE, *January 16, 1915*

Nothing in front of us has changed. The artificial inundation made a great, fragmentary sea out of the numerous canals,

and hinders any important attack on either side. In spite of this no day passes without its toll of dead.

The storms from the west almost drag you off your horse and fling the rain-clouds incessantly on to the earth, like bursting hose-pipes—armies of clouds.

This is a war of attrition; the side that is used up first will lose it.

One begins to sneak away from one's post—inwardly—with a certain pleasure in sneaking away.

DRYWEGE, *January 21, 1915*

Kitchener is reported to have said, when asked when the War would end, that he did not know; he only knew that it would begin in May. If only they would save up our new Corps until the men are well grounded in discipline and the officers in leadership; they are absolutely useless here at present, because of circumstances that I have often tried to depict.

What the English do they do well; they will make good soldiers. Perhaps not so many as people think, but good ones.

If England were to introduce Conscription it would be more dangerous for us than anything she has ever done. For I do not agree with those who ask contemptuously where they will find their officers and N.C.O.'s. They will all come—the rowing blues, the leading lights of the cricket and football teams, the athletic trainers, runners, and many more. Are the Berlin police to be compared with the English police, although most of them are Prussian N.C.O.'s? The English policemen know how to deal with masses; they handle them perfectly. The quality of troops has always compensated for their comparatively small numbers. They have given us plenty of trouble here, too, few though they are—in fact, definitely outnumbered.

To . . .

*January 21, 1915*

Bad news from home: T.'s accident. That such a misfortune should befall a delicate little creature, like a strong person whose strength could be put to the test! But we have spoilt



ourselves by expecting Providence to be reasonable. If we appreciate its senselessness more we will be better armed against such injustice.

Here I sit, where the most simple-minded N.C.O. could probably do all that is expected of me for the next few weeks. But I cannot follow where my thoughts lead me—to give a little sympathy, gently to compel someone to get out into the open air.

Bad news from home. The letters I get are sorrowful and spiritless. It almost seems as if ordained that you should suffer the loss of a motherly woman at this moment when it must seem lighter in the presence of bitter disaster far and near. A monstrous cloud lies upon us all; who thinks of the hail-stone that strikes down a tired flower? One thing is certain: these times can only be endured by a soldier. And they must be endured! If one looked round for the thing we call happiness, that was once and will be again, this War would be unendurable. I must give myself up willingly to the War, the Lord of the Hour; anything else were a betrayal at the supreme moment. No, let us inhale its fiery breath; then each of us will bury his dead more easily, weep over them more simply, and mourn them more beautifully, as all his actions must be easier, simpler, and more beautiful.

Peace will come overnight. There is no other gospel to-day.

We are, both of us, in the War; although many miles lie between us.

January 28, 1915

Yesterday we celebrated the Kaiser's birthday as well as we could; it was a clear, bright, frosty day. The dragoons cheered at every excuse. Afterwards we had the chance of a cheery lunch as a ration of wine was issued for the purpose: The beaches supplied oysters, the *Proviantamt* provided wine—a bottle and a half of fizz for three warriors' throats. There was a certain satisfaction in it—for the three half-bottles bore the inscription "Reserved for Great Britain," and were accordingly

of the very best. One had a special pleasure in drinking wine that the English had counted on, and that cost nothing into the bargain. But I notice that no French vintner labels his bottles "Reserved for Germany." That would only apply to their inferior productions, for the best goes to England.

*To . . .*

DRYWEGE, *February 1, 1915*

• If one really lives in the War—I mean, if one puts Peace resolutely behind one—one gains a pleasant feeling of detachment from all that one has known. All that lies behind me can be seen at a glance, because of the War and the detached point of view that it gives—like a high mountain range full of ridges, abysses, slopes, deep valleys, and trackless masses of stone in the distance. All the details have suddenly taken their proper place as a part of my Peace amongst this orderly assembly of masses and lines. But I would do the War an injustice were I always to look back to Peace as a bad horse yearns for the stable. So that if I did not take you out of Peace into the War with me—into the winds that blow there, into the code that it has set up, into the feelings that it dictates—I should feel that I had abandoned you in those high and far-off mountains. And as you are the only creature that I take with me into this strange land that is called War, I know that you must have a part in it.

Perhaps you will think that I am consciously avoiding a difficulty—uniting the War in front of us with the Peace behind us. But I say that this is to live in two worlds; it is not honest.

GITS, *February 7, 1915*

The reinforcement of the infantry has brought about a redistribution of units in the billeting area allotted to the Division. So I find myself not far from the old cluster of farms in a larger village with a church, the inevitable convent, schools, etc.

As there are a great many farms in the neighbourhood I

have to deal with many matters of civil administration which are most complicated and tiresome. Passes, requisitions, proclamations—for which I have taken over a small printing-press—street-cleaning, burial of the dead, protection of the milch-cows from the grasping and wasteful hands of the supply-column people, police and guards, repairs to the church clock, closing hours of pubs., and many other oddments have to be attended to.

*February 14, 1915*

I read in the papers that the bread consumption of Greater Berlin is so regulated that each person will get four pounds a week. This may be enough or it may not—the working-man's wife of the great city may dictate other laws. It will be seen that the masses are becoming unpleasantly aware of their participation in the destiny and the life of our people. This in a way which is not the way of our people, but the way of masses. No national unity, no courage, and no sacrifice can prevent this.

If only it is true that this bread rationing will see us through till the next harvest! But what if the crops fail? The horses will not be able to pull their weight on short rations of oats, and there may not be enough of them anyhow. Will the farmer be able to carry out his usual work with oxen and a steam-plough lent to him for the day? The landowners and their stewards spend enough time in the fields.

*February 17, 1915*

It may be that the positive achievement of the War is that it destroys many untruths. Retrogression cannot stand before it, retrogressive inadequacy least of all. This is comforting. One thinks: Should all this trial and sacrifice, all this upheaval and change in one's inward consciousness, be borne in order that one may sink back afterwards into the same muddy water in which we once lived? I cannot believe it.

Peace is surely a long way off still. It is true that we are waging war almost exclusively in the enemy's country; but

it could go against us just as well in a foreign country as at home. If we could surround, defeat, and disarm a French army, I should not care whether we did so at Verdun or at Frankfort-on-Main.

They say that they make war; but the War is leading them. It is like riding; if a man lets his horse carry him along the Kurfürstendamm he says that he has ridden along the Kurfürstendamm. It seems that we have only one man who knows how to make war. I take it that he will comb through Russia—which may take longer than he thinks in view of the numbers of men and lice—and that he will then come over here and have the courage to bring this long Front into movement.

March 1, 1915

The weather is bringing in March with a regular gust of folly. Real thunderstorms, with thunder and lightning; during which the silly snow still flings itself in white clouds upon the earth; wind, ice, and thaw, dark yellow blankets of clouds and nonsensical snatches of sun; and always storms, storms, storms.

We have just had five thunderstorms in twenty-four hours. This appears to be a custom of the country. We have a *Donderschirm* on top of the house—the reassuring local name for a lightning-conductor. A wind-umbrella would suit me better than the thunder-umbrella, for the wind blows through these jerry-built erections like a tune on the bagpipes, and the cold hearths make a suitable accompaniment. They say that March is the wettest month here; how it can differ in that respect from the February we have just gone through is not clear to me. No swaddling-clothes can be as wet as this country. No one can be very pleased with life. Nor does the War help in any way. Newly arrived munitions are thundering and the trenches are lamenting. We are trying to take on the cultivation of the fields with our own men, for many of them in the fighting zone have no one to attend to them; we are improving communications somewhat, and doing the pubs. a good turn by letting them sell German beer, which can be procured at great

expense from Bruges—against our better judgment. This is all so insignificant and unsatisfactory.

No one seems to be able to raise waiting to an art in which one may take pleasure.

The troops are spending a lot of money on beer, cigars, and brandy, instead of sending it home as they used to. The Corps Field Cashier told me that in the first few months, when the men could not spend any money, about a million and a half marks were sent home every month from our corps alone. Now only about half this sum is sent.

I have my own ideas on the subject.

To . . .

GITS, *March* 15, 1915

What a time we live in! Spring is coming, and one expects for oneself as well a share of resurrection the same as every year. But the expectation looks so different this time. The resurrection of Nature, one's own pleasure in the growing light, in the warmer sun, in the disappearance of rain and fog, is strangely and cruelly changed into one idea: now we can advance! Soon! The masses that have lain in their armed winter sleep, as under an evil spell, will be set in motion. These milder winds, these piping thrushes, these breathing fields, excite the will to live—not for friendly deeds, but for a shock to measure the weight of new forces, to battle for life and death. In the springtime love or strife seem to be equally fitted to make our pulses beat faster; and many an one looks at himself and wonders if it does not mean the same thing.

We are entering this period with the knowledge that the end is yet far away. Many believe that the victor will be the one who can hold out the longest. Seeking to build in the spirit, I still hope that the War will be decided otherwise than by the effect of the power machine that can hold out longest and work most economically.

Unfortunately the weak ones who look back to their home and hearth, even more so to their chair and bed, their circle of friends in the pub. and their slippers, and are getting "nervous"



through the lack of these things, is increasing. Then they make out that the War has made them nervous and go home. Everyone that goes into the War should have to burn his house behind him; indeed, he should not have a house at all! In this respect the mercenary, the professional soldier, have their advantages. It is a matter of course to them, and they are not thinking of getting home.

I will cherish the day on which I shall see you again, but I don't feel I have any right to come home yet. I have the conscience of a submarine.

*Same place, same date*

The colours of the landscape are very bright, but not sharp and definite. It is as if it had been drawn with a delicate silver pencil or rubbed—very soft.

The troops are providing horses for the cultivation of the field as the peasantry have hardly any left. The ammunition columns are not only available for this duty, they even offer themselves for it; so that the horses which have little to do at the present time will not be getting entirely out of the habit of draft work.

*Same place, same date*

Things are always happening that educate one for peace, so to speak. We are going in for cavalry training; but whoever knows what the real thing is like must have a horror of such exercises. When there are not bullets and rifles there is always a false picture which the minds of men confuse with the real thing.

But mankind is so unaccustomed to appreciate the gulf that lies between the real thing and the gesture, even the theatrical impression, that a Rittmeister of the Divisional Staff, otherwise a very fine and serious fellow, got off the following performance. In a field that had to be ploughed the horses shied in a certain place every time we went over it. They dug and found a very lightly covered grave of six German soldiers, who had doubtless been left by quickly advancing troops who

never found them afterwards. The corpses had to be reburied. As the poor fellows had not yet had any military honours this officer, who had charge of reburial, wanted to fire a volley over the grave in their honour. What did he do? As it seemed too dangerous to him to fire rounds of ball he tried to get blank cartridges, of which quantities have recently been issued for training behind the front. Luckily there was none in the neighbourhood, and the buried warriors were deprived of the honour of a theatrical salvo as a last greeting.

*March 19, 1915*

Things are standing as still as in a swamp. All the things that are supposed to count as movements, that are described and celebrated as such in the papers, are only bubbles. The effects of the submarines do not move England. The advance of Soissons is long since forgotten, and indeed trickles down to nothing; everything stinks just like a swamp stinks. Joffre has not beaten our Army but paralysed it like a frog.

One can only hold out if one knows there is a plan—that has sense and understanding. Instead of this there is no plan at all; and we do not know how to make the next move.

One sets up gigantic guns or such like monstrosities and gets enthusiastic over the calibre of their shells. One bombards Nieuwpoort and Ypres with them, though everybody admits that it is no real use.

*March 24, 1915*

I am glad that B. B. has got his commission, and yet he must not only have conducted himself well and gallantly—of which there is no doubt—but his superiors must have pushed him as well. I was in the same position in having to recommend a Jew for a Commission and had my work cut out to push him through. But though I am fully convinced that the War entirely justifies the promotion of everyone who has distinguished himself brilliantly and has taken his part on these grounds, a number of incidents have shown that Jews are unsuitable as officers and for positions of command. Hence it



is hard to take the responsibility of making them officers on their own account.

I wondered for a long time what exactly is the cause of it. It seems to me to be requiring of a being that has been bred for certain qualities through long generations of in-breeding, that he should suddenly show quality for which the system of breeding has not fitted him. There are other professions, too, that the Jew instinctively declines, that he cannot grasp hold of, and I am convinced that he has not the psychology of an officer; and my splendid K., who says as a Jew of the Jews "I ought to know them," bears me out in this. Let us suppose for a moment that we had a mercenary army. Would the Jew choose a soldier's life for himself? If he feels that he is fit to be an officer, it is not because he is a born officer, but because he wants to prove that he can do it too.

I should like to tell you here how I recommended a Jew for promotion to commission rank and what happened.

At the beginning of the War many officer aspirants were seconded from the cavalry as A.D.C.'s. This borrowing from cavalry formations took place in order that the infantry should not be weakened by detaching officers or those who might become officers. I among others was ordered to send an A.D.C. to the Staff of the General commanding one of our infantry brigades. I seconded a Reserve Lance-Sergeant Koch for the post.

The General was pleased with his A.D.C. He was a well-educated, well-bred young man, looked all right, was a good horseman, and had his heart in the right place. The General was pleased to notice that his horses got on very well since K. was appointed to his staff; the General himself was better looked after. He rode round the positions of his troops with K. alone, as nobody could find his way on the map so well as his new A.D.C. And the General discovered many other virtues in him.

Nor was I entirely without merit, for, as the General was not pleased with his horse—or the horse was not pleased with the General, one can never be sure—I exchanged "J" for a

particularly reliable animal which was known as the "Yellow Sofa," and which had up till then graced the ranks of my squadron. After riding him in a bit, as he said, the General was very pleased with the horse.

Only a few weeks passed before the Lance-Sergeant, who had shown up well in carrying out his orders, received the Iron Cross on the recommendation of the General.

When the General thought the time was come he wrote me a letter; he represented to me that one really could not allow such an excellent young man to run round any longer without the silver epaulets of an officer; that he had all the qualities one could require in an officer. I was to recommend the Lance-Sergeant for a commission as he intended to have him as his A.D.C. on regular establishment. He would endorse my recommendation.

As K. belonged to my squadron I had to make the recommendation to the Emperor myself. The General's endorsement might help it. I did as I was told. The very next day a proposal for promotion to a commission on the unattached list, as this document has the honour to call itself, was placed in the hands of the General, as I, too, could take the responsibility for it. All the columns of the form were cleanly ruled and neatly filled in, as required by regulations for these documents.

The General read over the details with pleasure. There stood his family and given names, the date of his birth, his profession. The General had not been wrong; the man had led an orderly life.

But he suddenly froze. For there stood, just under the word "Religion"—there could be no mistake about it: just under the word "Religion" stood—"Hebrew." The General flew up in the air. Everything that was Prussian in him was horrified; everything that was Christian no less. And the General was very Prussian and very Christian.

What was he to do?

He rode at once to me. "Did you know that K. is a Jew?" he asked. "Certainly I knew it," said I. "Then you cannot

recommend him for a commission," said the General very convincingly.

"I cannot find," said I, "that his beliefs in any way detract from his courage, his usefulness, his good behaviour, and all those good qualities that you, sir, have often told me that you discovered and prized in him."

"Well, yes," said the General, "that is quite true. But you must admit that he has qualities; I mean Jewish qualities. . . ."

I answered carefully: "That at any rate the General had not yet noticed such qualities. For the rest, I did not quite understand what qualities he meant."

The General did not elaborate this theme. "Oh well, it won't do," said he; "you must take back the recommendation."

"But, sir," said I, "you asked for the proposal yourself. How could I take back a recommendation for a subordinate when I have made it according to my duty and my conscience?"

The General went away; but he did not give up his idea. For a long time he did not forward the recommendation. He discussed the case every day. I could not be blind. The Lance-Sergeant had Jewish qualities! They formed the chief part of his argument.

So the matter dragged along for a week or two. One day the General was talking about it again. "You can say what you like to me," said he, "K. has unbearable Jewish qualities—only Jewish qualities in fact."

I thought to myself: this has gone far enough. "Yes, sir," said I, almost astonished, "as he is a Jew why should he have other than Jewish qualities?"

The General was taken aback. Something had happened to him that he could not fathom. I had suddenly let go of the rope on which he had been pulling; he felt that he had fallen down. He still had a vague feeling that everything was not quite as it should be, but he felt himself disarmed.

"Do you really mean that?" said he. "Yes," said I. He rode

back to his billet and wrote his "Forwarded and recommended" under the recommendation of a Jew for promotion to commissioned rank.

GITS, *March 28, 1915*

The door is always going. The most insignificant things come through, and are doubly annoying because they make themselves felt in spite of the War. A subaltern from another unit wants to exchange a horse; he brings in a "fine bay" whose coat is the only attractive thing about it. The Sergeant-Major does not get on with the Sergeant and grouses. The man in the kitchen asks how many eggs he is to cook for dinner. The Sergeant-Major brings in a pack of orders in which there is no reference to us. The secretary of the village council asks whether three little pigs may be sold. Visit from an old woman who thinks that I will understand her if she shouts loud enough. I do not understand. Five minutes later another visit from the same woman. Visit from an N.C.O. from the Office with passes to sign. I wrote my name fifty-three times, as one doing lines at school. A subaltern has come here for a Sunday visit from a long way off and rides away again. Now it is night, and I can take up my pen with some confidence that I will not be interrupted.

But I am too tired. I rode to Divisional Headquarters to-day in the face of an icy north wind—a vain effort to make myself useful—and I am feeling feverish. Yesterday the same useless stunt to Army Headquarters in Thielt. A horse that I have to ride in, apart from a tour of forty-three kilometres, for the G.O.C., is a machine that is getting tired, and will fall to pieces if not held together.

I would not mind getting tired for something sensible.

### *Easter Letter*

WEST FLANDERS

I have not written to you for a long time, but I have thought of you all the more as a silent creditor. But when one owes letters one suffers from them, so to speak, at the same time.

It is, indeed, not so simple a matter to write from the War, really from the War; and what you read as Field Post letters in the papers usually have their origin in the lack of understanding that does not allow a man to get hold of the War, to breathe it in although he is living in the midst of it. Certainly it is a strange element for everyone; but I probably find it even stranger, and feel more like a fish out of water than many who write about it—because I try to understand it. The further I penetrate its true inwardness the more I see the hopelessness of making it comprehensible for those who only understand life in the terms of peace-time, and apply these same ideas to war in spite of themselves. They only think that they understand it. It is as if fishes living in the water could have a clear conception of what living in the air is like. When one is hauled out on to dry land and dies in the air, then he will know something about it.

So it is with the War. Feeling deeply about it, one becomes less able to talk about it every day. Not because one understands it less each day, but because one grasps it better. But it is a silent teacher, and he who learns becomes silent too.

The stagnation that this siege warfare has brought about gives a superficial observer the illusion of peace. One regulates intercourse with the local population as well as one can, one tries to arrange for the tillage of the land, one trains the men as well as possible in mud and filth, one visits the officers of neighbouring units, one spends hours in discussion. The War is ignored; for not everyone has the capacity or the habit to notice it in everything and everyone. Yet it is behind everything and everyone; that is the strange part of it! The starlings that winter hereabouts in hordes whistle like rifle-bullets; and as the bullets cannot have learnt to whistle from the starlings one may safely presume the opposite. And everything whistles its tune of the War—the houses, the fields, men, beasts, rivers, and even the sky. The very milk turns sour under the thunder of shell-fire.

You will think that I am romancing. But I am not. Only . . . the others do not notice this. They do not listen to the star-



lings; they hardly look at the fields; mankind has not changed since yesterday; and the milk has got sour through standing.

What exactly do they experience of the War? They know that the dug-outs in the line are comfortably fitted up, that they have brought up a mirror and a clock, that they have barbed wire in front of them, that the gunners hide their shells carefully, that troops are flung in here and there, that the Field Post functions, that there are brave men who have been rewarded with the Iron Cross.

Then again, they notice effects. They see the wounded, hear of the dead, hear of towns that have been taken, of positions lost or won. But that is not the melody of war. It is as if one were to describe and understand the being and the melody of the wind by saying that it chases dead leaves, that the weathercock creaks, and that the washing on the line dries. All that is not its melody; as the fitting out of a trench, the Iron Cross, and even the dead are only infinitesimal outward and recognizable signs of an unknown and hidden majesty, be it sublime or cruel.

Perhaps some poet has already seen this majesty unveiled—heard this melody, which may be nothing but a bellow, so that it can be reproduced. As for myself, the sounds increase, but the melody and rhythm remain obscure.

And if I could summon all the poets of past times to sing the War they might all remain silent—unless one should answer who has been through hell.

So you may appreciate how hard it is to write about the War. Its Being is veiled; and where the greatness is recognizable human speech has no expression to cope with it. What can you make of it when I tell you that I live in a house with no architectural style, windows that do not shut properly, and high rooms; that I have a bed; that two little old women wait on me and do my cooking; and that I curse the eternal rain that the sky of Flanders pours down upon us? All this seems to me so immeasurably dull compared with the War; just as one can only bear the insignificant things of life by not talking about them. I use the same soap as in peace-time; I have time

to brush my teeth in the morning; I have a brown coffee-pot and a stove that does not heat well. Why should I tell you about them? The piping of the starlings, the aspect of the sickly fields, the thunderous air and the sour milk will tell you much more.

But in the midst of the monstrous event stands Man; the thousands and the hundreds of thousands, the combatants and the non-combatants; who all have one wish and one goal: to cast aside the War; to render its effect invisible so far as they can be understood; to let a well-earned Peace grow its grass over the victims and to carry on as before, broadly speaking. The times may be as big as they will; man remains small. Transformation and cleansing have nothing to do with him.

They say, they know, that we will win; what a wonderful thing it is to know this and to say it. But we shall not conquer ourselves. We will carry on as before and think what wonderful new things we have set up in place of the old. For many things that are ought to be scrapped; and many that are as yet undiscovered are worth bringing to life.

That sounds very hard, doesn't it? But it should at least be allowed to him who feels the hardness of the times to speak out his hard words. You will ask what I would put in the place of that which is past or what new things there are to be discovered.

I believe that it could be expressed thus—a religion of defensive power—for all peoples. There should be a belief in the right to be in a state of defence, to defend oneself; this and nothing more. This would give to us and to the world, which would adopt our religion, such immense strength—for religions outlast history, peoples and empires, civilization and philosophy, discoveries and the progress of man—so that no nation or concourse of nations would stand up to us. Defensive power would stand sanctified, with the weapons of defence in her hand, as with the products of toil in her arms; unattackable, uniting through the strength of the idea, resting on a joyous security of belief, inspiring piety because of man's belief in her. I would not challenge this time to bring forth a religion did I not know how great it is. It bears the child;



we are but clumsy helpers in her heavy hour; and who shall deny either the immensity of the event or the helplessness of mankind—even for our people alone—to turn it into good?

An enormous longing arises in the world, not longing for strange countries, not for seas, fortresses, riches, and power—but for a gift of grace from these times that are worthy alike of themselves and of us.

*March 30, 1915*

We have been doing a reconnaissance exercise behind the lines—just like peace-time. Same old trotting without sense or rhythm. I had a real château for my night quarters—furnished but half emptied. It belonged to the Duc de Beaufort; the owners are not there. Have they flown? are they in Brussels? I slept in the Duchess's magnificent carved four-poster. A little Virgin in a pretty baroque shrine looked down upon me graciously from the wall. Marvellous birds went to and fro on the arabesques of the wall-paper; ancient yew-trees, tattered by the wind and the years, rustled in front of the high windows. A little slate hung on one of the bed-posts, and there were still shopping and errand notes on it, in the handwriting of the Duchess? How long has it been hanging there? Everything in the room was pleasant, really charming, kindly, and human. When I awoke in the morning I wrote a little declaration on the slate, as there was still room for it:

“Madame, j’ai dormi  
Dans votre lit  
Seul, sans vous.  
C’était un peu fou.  
Quand même :  
Je vous aime.”

Perhaps she is an old lady; but I felt that she was worthy of this declaration. By the way, this château was the only one with a real style that I have found in this country yet.

GITS, *April 4, 1915*

We have had a series of enchanting early spring days. The landscape is marvellously full of a soft brightness; the fields are aflame. Lights like a Van Gogh sketch gleam in the damp, greasy furrows; there is much lilac and silver in everything. The face of the country is happier than that of any other plain and that I know. There is not a dead stretch of sand, not a neglected corner; everything is well cultivated. One notices for the first time how narrow is the actual zone of battle and destruction. The peasants' pleasure in their work has returned with the necessity of tilling the fields. They are gaining confidence that it will not be in vain, and that they will not again be exposed to devastation.

*April 18, 1915*

The German flying service leaves much to be desired. They are stout fellows; but what is the use of that! We have mostly unarmed 'planes; the few armed ones are slower than the French and cannot come out in squadron formation as there are too few of them. Why? As if they could not be built! We learnt their use as a weapon (not only for scouting) from the enemy first of all, but people make a fuss as if we had invented something wonderful. We have no imagination.

VIJFWEGE, *April 24, 1915*

The effects of the successful gas attack were horrible. I am not pleased with the idea of poisoning men. Of course, the entire world will rage about it first and then imitate us. All the dead lie on their backs, with clenched fists; the whole field is yellow. They say that Ypres must fall now. One can see it burning—not without a pang for the beautiful city. Langemarck is a heap of rubbish, and all rubbish-heaps look alike; there is no sense in describing one. All that remains of the church is the doorway with the date "1620."

*April 27, 1915*

Last night I salved three captured guns that were lying in full view of the enemy's new line, not more than five hundred metres away. The moon was shining, and, apart from this, the enemy kept the battlefield continually lighted up with most damnably bright Very lights. We were all night on the job, constantly interrupted by furious bursts of fire and by the Very lights, which obliged us to lie flat on the ground as long as they were burning. Before dawn we got all three guns into safety, together with their limbers and ammunition. One of my men was shot through the heart because he tried to bring back a sucking-pig which he found squeaking in its lonely pen on one of the limbers. He sat on top, while his comrades put their shoulders to the wheels. Suddenly he fell lifeless between the wheels, still holding his little pig in the grip of death.

After fresh attacks a sleeping army lies in front of one of our brigades; they rest in good order, man by man, and will never wake again—Canadian divisions. The enemy's losses are enormous.

The battlefield is fearful. One is overcome by a peculiar sour, heavy, and penetrating smell of corpses. Rising over a plank bridge you find that its middle is supported only by the body of a long-dead horse. Men that were killed last October lie half in swamp and half in the yellow-sprouting beet-fields. The legs of an Englishman, still encased in puttees, stick out into a trench, the corpse being built into the parapet; a soldier hangs his rifle on them. A little brook runs through the trench, and everyone uses the water for drinking and washing; it is the only water they have. Nobody minds the pale Englishman who is rotting away a few steps farther up. In Langemarck cemetery a hecatomb had been piled up; for the dead must have lain above ground-level. German shells falling into it started a horrible resurrection. At one point I saw twenty-two dead horses, still harnessed, accompanied by a few dead drivers; Cattle and pigs lie about, half-rotten; broken trees, drives razed to the ground; crater upon crater in the roads and in the fields. Such is a six months' old battlefield.

And close behind it, in the rest-positions of the reserves, are miracles of order and industry. Hutments, living trains, and a bath train, brought up on a specially constructed railway line. There are well-made roads that were nothing but bottomless slashings in a wood. And yet, and yet—genius is still lacking.

*May 7, 1915*

The French are terribly indifferent; they did not bury their dead, although they had lain for months in the trenches we have taken. The latter are carelessly planned and badly made; our trenches are perfect drawing-rooms compared to them.

They even left the bodies of their officers lying about. I brought away an identity disc as a curiosity and a proof of this. It strikes one as strange that an officer forty-six years old should be killed in the front line and not brought back. Unfortunately I could not make out his rank and regiment.

Even where they have buried their dead they take care that the graves should soon be indistinguishable from the rest of the ground. They are marked with a little cross not more than two hands high, generally two twigs bound together. But I seldom saw any names. If the French Government were minded to issue no casualty lists they could write "missing" against the names of all the dead who could not be located—thereby encouraging the idea that all these missing men are prisoners of the Germans—and then a shrug of the shoulders. In any case, it is very noticeable how many German graves one finds and how few French ones. Only he who seeks carefully finds traces and effaced proofs that their losses were probably as heavy as ours.

*VIIFFWEGE, May 16, 1915*

One of our attacks beaten back with losses, and—what is worst of all—the men have got sticky with the losses and cannot be got out of the trenches for the attack. The officers are stout lads, but lack the proper training and ability, and can

no longer get them forward. I cannot altogether blame the men; the fault lies in their lack of personal authority. I would probably not get out of a trench into heavy fire myself if one of them ordered me to do so.

VIJFWEGE, *May*, 21, 1915

We have been attacking again; success nil; heavy losses, including many officers—again. The men see that they are not out for a big purpose, only for a trench; and they are no longer willing to sacrifice themselves for that.

What is the use, I ask? This is pure dilettantism. I say this, not secretly but openly, for anyone who cares to hear it.

Yesterday the idea of waving the green flag of the prophet from our trenches was seriously debated, in order to induce the African troops to desert. Just like fourth-form schoolboys.

VIJFWEGE, *May* 23, 1915

A Pentecost that could not be more Pentecostally imagined: the world dances in sunlight and a mild wind rolls the smell of blossoms and sweet scents in clouds across the land. The horses are neighing and kicking. Nightingales are singing—and before us lies the War. He demands that all this should make way for him.

*June* 28, 1915

I am in Berlin, buying horses. At the Front one met people who had come from Berlin and who said that one could not see any signs of a war there. They must be blind.

Certainly it would be foolish to produce bread-cards as the only outward and visible sign of the War. The fact that there are many soldiers about would not in itself be characteristic; but what soldiers one sees, where one sees them, and how! Did you ever meet a private soldier (excepting a few orderlies) in Unter den Linden in peace-time? It is full of them now. Not very warlike in their clothing, carriage, and appearance, many of them wounded, all of them feeling and acting as the chief



personage of the Drama—as well they may be. They are of all ages; they are a proof of how deeply Fate has dug into our lives.

The traffic in the streets is different, very different. There are cabs and cars, trams, pedestrians, and cyclists indeed; but all this is concentrated in a few main arteries. The rest are practically bloodless. There are crowds in the pubs., hotels, expensive restaurants, and the Unter den Linden. But the quiet parts are quieter than ever. The shops, too, those that are to be seen: who wants to buy a piece of furniture, a carpet, a wall-paper, a sporting-gun, a shirt, a walking-stick—yes, even a girl of the streets? Not to speak of Arts and Industry, fine craftsmanship, building, and public works. This is a very vivid impression. Another thing is worthy of note—that the banks close from half-past twelve till three.

I had to stand up all the way from Cologne to Brussels because the train was packed. Met U.R., who gave a delightful description of the German poets assembled in Brussels under the ægis of Walter Bloem.

WEST FLANDERS, *July 17, 1915*

Concerts are being given in Roulers for the troops who have been well knocked about in the line and are back in rest billets; but though I was longing for music and the singers came from the best opera companies in Germany—although they did their best, one could not enjoy the music properly. I don't know whether this was because of the striking discord between the growl of the guns and the songs, which were mostly about young love, lime-trees, sleeping children, and the like—I don't think so. For when one man sang a bad war ballad by Loewe I could not get any nearer to it, well as it sounded, than to Brahms' young love. Finally I was more unpleasantly moved than pleasantly by this effort to introduce anything but war. Others may have felt differently. They seemed to be delighted; but I know that they liked to be given the unaccustomed illusion of Peace.

Kirchhoff sang, "Lord, let us conquer," or something of the



sort. At the end there was great enthusiasm, so far as one could judge by the clapping and the cries of "Bravo!" But it seemed to me that something was being forcibly crammed into these souls that did not belong there.

*To . . .*

*August 5, 1915*

The War is changing for me; perhaps this happens to everyone sooner or later. For the last few weeks I no longer look to him alone as to the only Lord of us all, claiming on unwilling allegiance. I think of you, too. Not that I had forgotten you, but you were more inside me and with me. Now I feel that you are something behind me, that I had to leave at home, and that I must now worry about—from a distance.

For this reason I think of Peace, too. But I say with truth that this is not the only reason; the War itself gradually brings the warrior round to this point of view. This is not a summit, but rather an end at which one arrives.

Here on the Western Front the War has lost all its dash; it is so devoid of resiliency, and so bloodless that the blood which still flows daily seems like a sign of old age, where the blood oozes through the brittle walls of the veins.

The fact that regimental bands are being formed to entertain officers and men, that one keeps up a continual chit-chat of formal and unnecessary correspondence—these are bad signs. The Corps Commander unveiled a monument to the dead of his corps, which the town of Roulers was ordered to erect in the middle of the cemetery; deputations from every unit were ordered to attend; the orders went into detail to the extent of directing that each deputation was to bring three bouquets; bands were playing, representatives of other corps and sundry generals were asked; and this took up the whole morning and half the afternoon.

If we look towards the enemy's front it seems to be even duller. French is doing nothing whatever. One can imagine him following a routine something like this: He starts the morning by smoking his pipe for two hours; then an hour and

a half on his hunter, at a walk, varied from time to time by a nice steady canter; then a wisely ordered and comfortable breakfast; then running foolishly to and fro for a couple of hours, which he calls exercise—any old field glass is good enough to see his officers actually doing this every day; after this he disappears into a bomb-proof dug-out to read a number of newspapers; then he has a quiet hour before lunch, followed by a little light conversation over a whisky and soda; in the afternoon he sends forth a report of about six lines, as he really does not like writing. Then it is tea-time and the end of the day is in sight. He is typical of the lack of imagination that is the worst vice of a Commander. But you need only translate the English expressions into German—with the exception of a few peculiarly English customs—and the picture will portray our side of the line just as well.

To come back to our own side, it is hard to say whether it is a symptom of insignificant or empty leadership that we have had quite a number of deserters during the period of idleness. Three Alsatians deserted a short time ago; we have a good many of them in our regiments. Perhaps the War has had only an indirect effect in this case, the lack of more warlike occupation allowing the N.C.O.'s to be unpleasantly attentive to these elements. At any rate, people in their regiment say that it is no wonder, since they were so maltreated! The German N.C.O. does not know the difference between the use of influence and brutality. Whether he has to deal with subordinates in his own capacity, or with the public in that of a policeman, or with a horse as its rider, does not matter; he ill-treats them. The broken-spirited horse, the sulky public are the results; but he does not know it. He finds the broken horse "well ridden in," the deserter has not been knocked about enough, and the sullen public requires further training.

So these three Alsatians deserted; gave away the position of the trenches in the sector they knew; and brought a well-prepared bombardment, an infantry attack, and some losses upon our troops. One asks: Why did they serve a year with us, share our victories, and then desert, although they were in

no present peril in our ranks and not a shot fell near them for days on end?

To me it seems to be a symptom.

If troops from the Eastern Front are liberated to serve on our front soon, as has been planned, the senilities of the western war should soon disappear. Those who return from leave no longer find the excitement of the wind and storm, filled with the early enthusiasm and the fresh smell of blood; the affairs of home have gained a greater importance because the War is older. Peace, as a condition, takes precedence of War while the latter is still going on. We say that we do not think of Peace, but at the same time we long for it.

And yet there are people who enjoy the War. But they are those who know nothing about it. The *Archives of Reason* give good advice on this point to those Americans who want war.

"Dig a trench shoulder-high in your garden; fill it half-full of water and get into it. Remain there for two or three days on an empty stomach. Furthermore, hire a lunatic to shoot at you with revolvers and machine-guns at close range. This arrangement is quite equal to a war and will cost your country very much less."

I like the hired lunatic especially.

#### IN HOSPITAL AT GHENT, *August 1915*

It is quite good for a man to find out occasionally that he can take a nasty knock without quite going off the rails.

My stomach still looks like a yellow butterfly and my thigh like a painter's palette, but I have started to crawl about again. The doctor won't let me get back to the Front yet, because he considers an effusion of blood in the thigh as a foreign body—naturally, I do not agree with him.

A big Field Recruit Depot has been installed here; men of the Last Class (1915) are being trained, and they are shaping very well indeed. They applied for officers from the Front—at last—and actually got a few. These training depots, far removed from home, from relevants and irrelevant, near the

enemy, are quite a sensible idea; it can be felt. Really good work is being done, though with very uneven means. The German officer in the War—he requires a chapter to himself.

The industry of the Recruit Depot contrasts sharply with the Lines of Communication troops. The fighting soldier has invented rather a rude name for them (*Etapenschweine*). It is hard to understand why these bloated bellies, these plural necks and puffed cheeks, these waggling bottoms and flat feet should be swaggering around in the uniform of a German officer; why people who regard a horse as the most unpleasant animal on earth excepting a louse should wear spurs. If these creatures are really necessary they should not be invested with an authority—that of an officer—which they, barring a few exceptions, abuse as a matter of course. The Caste is being dishonoured; and this must revenge itself in some way.

GHENT, *August 23, 1915*

. . . to realize the truth that “the War is lasting an awfully long time,” as you say, is all the more oppressive. One sighs all the more, and feels that one has the right to do so when one is condemned to the endless task of a dam here. And the worst of it is that one dams only stagnant water.

*Same place, same date*

We read about the strength and the capital of the German people every day; but we hear nothing of that particular capital that is going every day, never to return. It is not possible to obtain a true picture from the casualty lists (although, of course, they are complete); one should rather calculate how quickly the slightly wounded get back to the Front, how many break up without having been wounded, and many other things. It seems that every headquarters, down to the Company Commander, gives returns of their losses and asks for reinforcements. These drafts, in the immediate communication between the unit in the field and the draft-finding unit, are given over to fresh losses without reservation. Of course,

one could give a General a credit of men which he would not be allowed to exceed, but no one perhaps considers the capital of lives—or may in a given instance think of it, unless it be the Higher Command. Everybody takes it into consideration in secret; but when the order comes from above, “We will attack,” or “The position will be held,” it puts a stop to all considerations. Then it costs what it may.

VIJFWEGE, *August 27, 1915*

The heather is already blooming on the edge of the fields here; the harvest has been brought home by industrious German hands; the trees are losing their leaves, and much of the blue in the land is disappearing. The days are still long and sunny, but a cooler wind is already blowing amongst the warmth. And yet it seems to me as if the oaks had only just got green—indeed, as if the year had only just begun. This seems to me to be a disquieting sign for the terrible monotony of our soldier’s life in this immovable spot. The sleep of fairy tales, where no one notices that years and days are passing, is probably the poetical expression.

COLOGNE, *September 12, 1915*

It was not too easy last night. I believe I had to hold on to myself tight; and so I could neither say nor do anything. It did not even occur to me to take a last look. Suddenly the other thing came along, and I was thankful for it. It was like a parting to order or rather to a bugle call. When the bugle call is there it helps one to speed the parting.

Dozing in the night in darkness still left room for other thoughts. But the brightness of the morning is merciless enough to assure me that you are definitely not there.

I thought of you and others; that you would again stand alone in all your strife; and that I had not yet thanked you enough, could never have thanked you enough.

And then again I had to tell myself that nothing is really happening that we do not both take as a matter of course.



WEST FLANDERS, *September 18, 1915*

How oppressive is this enforced rest. One sees strange manifestations of human nature. Generals no longer get on with their Adjutants, whom they praised to high heaven only six weeks ago; minor details of drill are already choking experience of war; the *genius loci* that rules here is a small spirit, for the genius of the General is not to be seen.

I read Schlieffen's essay on this subject. I will do something of this kind again. The evenings are lengthening noticeably, and when I have to keep the conversation up entirely on my own, as usually happens, it is too tiring.

This war brings strange disclosures. It has just shown me the value of belonging to a family eugenically beyond reproach. There have been cases of hysteria among men. For instance, a man loses the use of his legs from falling down a couple of steps in a trench; another suddenly loses his speech and hearing through shell-fire. These people were perfectly healthy in peace-time. But their defects suddenly come to light.

WEST FLANDERS, *October 4, 1915*

. . . For it was always so: Man tries to put an actuality in the place of an idea; it is based on the premises of actuality and therefore works out quite wrongly and disappointingly compared with the ideal. He wants to make dreams come true. The idea that such a procedure might be very bad for the ideals does not enter his head. It is hard for him to bear the fact that actuality is stronger than ideals. And so it is with the War.

*October 1915*

Now we have been lying about here for a year; nothing is decided, nothing is ripe for a decision. This perpetual lack of result requires an almost impossible degree of indolence or a patience that is quickly used up in waiting. The private soldier does not feel all this. For him it is a result of the day to look after his horses, to fetch his oats from the yard to



receive the post, to clean his carbine, and to wash his shirt. How much more easily he is satisfied!

This war disappoints many; but were we to disappoint ourselves in relation to it it would be worse.

WEST FLANDERS, *October 12, 1915*

A year ago the first portions of my division, amongst them the cavalry which I command, detrained in Enghien. This memory demonstrates a monstrous lack of decision, a running round in circles, a general futility. At that time the army commander received his troops with the message which read: That to this army of his which would take Ypres would fall the whole decision on the Western Front. We will not effect any decision, however small; and though it is undoubtedly praiseworthy to hold this position day and night with weaker and weaker forces, yet this praise is due, mechanically speaking, rather to a shield than to a sword, rather to a siege than to a campaign; in any case, more forced than spontaneous.

This is not encouraging to any of us. Even where things are moving no decisive push can be expected. I think they are making experiments. They are trying to find decisions where the possibility exists, but this is not at all certain. It may be right to crush Serbia; but that will not decide the World War. Besides, that was really Austria's job. Finally we may not be successful; and this creates new political *imponderabilia*; and this is dangerous. For this reason every long war is dangerous. War is, indeed, the continuation of policy, but this campaign against Serbia is too late a continuation. This chapter that has just been written seems to come too late in the history of the War. At the same time there is no real objective any longer in Russia, while on the Western Front we are on the defensive. And this at a time at which one hoped to have the army free for an attack.

That is how it looks, properly considered. I don't make things seem worse than they are, but I do not want to make them seem better. We have no grounds for anxiety, but no grounds for hope either. It is a condition of complete uncertainty.

*October 16, 1915*

Autumn is here. Here come the mists that lie over the land like a raging sea; swimming in this sea, monstrous bodies arise, drop back, and rise again, moving slowly. They are the herds of cattle, and these creatures really seem as if they were still in the throws of the Creation and could not tell whether they would belong to the water or the dry land. Where the sea of mist is not there are rows of red, violet, and green flames, flickering low down; the coloured leaves of the dying beet-fields . . . And the earth is deep violet. Then comes a row of glowing torches—their fire is gold and yellow, and strews itself in drops of gold on the wet roads; the poplars, whose endless alleys I have so often mentioned as typical of this country.

WEST FLANDERS, *October 19, 1915*

This is the anniversary of my baptism of fire in this War. We lie to-day hardly fifteen kilometres from the place where the first bullets whistled about us. The dead of yesterday lie with the dead of those days in the same monotonous cemeteries.

*Same place, same date*

We are getting ahead very slowly in Serbia, as I expected; elsewhere not at all. Hindenburg's troops have had to make an uninterrupted retirement of twenty-six hours in parts—this has not been published anywhere. The rear guard was continually harassed by Cossacks. I learnt this from the letter of a young cavalry officer, von B. Of course, anyone who could read the reports knew already that we had taken the old Russian fortress guns, but that their army as such is intact.

*October 23, 1915*

War is a terrible teacher. Whether of good or ill we do not know yet. The education of the individual to the reality which he practises so cruelly does not preclude the fantastic as reality proves itself more and more fantastic than the mind of

man can conceive; and yet the War has crippled our imagination. The intellect no longer works freely and independently; one is arrested by an incomprehensible event as one is hypnotized by the thunder and spray of a waterfall on the rocks. You cannot get away from it, and yet it has nothing more to tell you. You try to see something in it, and there is nothing to be seen.

Is mankind in this War only a moraine under the weight of a monstrous glacier? This glacier is slowly rolling down the valley; it never seems to get any lighter. When it no longer weighs on the moraine, when it is melted, only worn-out stones will be lying strewn over a wide field and they will not really know anything about the glacier.

But the stones will naturally raise an even murmur of many voices, for they were all there when the glacier came down the valley; they will all know about everything, and each one will say that what he has to relate is the most important.

Such is this War. It is not to be compared with a campaign. For there one leader pits his will against that of another. But in this War both the adversaries lie on the ground, and only the War has its will. At present the glacier is moving south-east; but it may take it into its head to move west, or in some other unforeseen direction. And all of us, Germans, English, French, Russians, and Italians, must move with it.

It may be that only one who was free before and who knew what freedom meant feels thus; he made his own life and lived it; he rode on the back of Time.

WEST FLANDERS, *October 25, 1915*

A woman writes me that it worries her very much—indeed, it horrifies her—that soldiers in the field should be nothing but material; how clearly it is a law of Nature that material should be quickly replaced.

That is certainly a fact, but this fact does not justify man in sacrificing material on this account; probably no one has the sensation of being sacrificed, of being sent into a holocaust, in the moment of battle.

Now does the individual fight for ideals. He only thinks so in the hours when he is not fighting, but when he is attacking, when he carries his lance, or swings his sabre, or grips his rifle with its fixed bayonet tighter, he has an elemental urge to get the other fellow. Then he has no ideals at all. Does he see a rival in the other? Does Cain kill Abel? All this is more probable than any conception further removed from the purely primitive, from a state of Nature. None would obey their leaders if we were not in a primitive state. This obedience is certainly not discipline in its deepest sense; it is the primitive instinct that makes one in danger follow the better man. Just as the strongest elephant leads his herd, so the soldier follows instinctively the person of his leader and can do nothing without him—and this is certainly a classic reversion to the primitive. Discipline, on the contrary, is an education to do things in a certain order, a putting of instinct in a leading rein, a perversion, in fact; inasmuch as all attention was directed to Hindenburg and away from the Western Front, to give an instance.

So I do not believe that the individual fights for ideals—that is, really in the fight; he strikes out so that the other will not strike; he does not flee because he is fighting in an unrighteous cause, he does not attack because his cause is just; he flees because he is the weaker, he conquers because he is the stronger or because his leader has made him feel stronger. Ideals do not help him.

It is curious what things have seemed suitable as ideals in the history of mankind and what things are not suitable. Helen of Troy would be unsuitable nowadays; so would Christianity. For the present the powerful word "Vaterland" suffices to encourage the German to get himself shot; whereas these same Germans would not sell a pound of the butter that they produce on the farm at home twenty-five pfennigs cheaper, however much one appealed to their ideals.

And then: does not the War become senseless, discordant, mendacious, when peoples fight for so-called ideals? What is the sense of saying that one fights for Kultur? I do not fight

for Kultur in the least, because I hold it to be nonsense to fight for Kultur with weapons in one's hand. I understand the stag who fights his rival for the right of the stronger to possess the doe. I understand the man who murders his enemy. I could even understand a fight for the joy of fighting, but it is not justifiable in the eyes of a thinking man to kill Englishmen, who have otherwise done me no harm, for the sake of Kultur, for Emperor and Empire (as a concept) and for national honour. Really the savage who wonders why people make war and kill each other without wishing to eat each other is quite right.

No; I stick to it, that ideals for which one is supposed to fight make the War senseless. It is quite different to unchain a war with them, to keep it going, to bring it to victory. They may be as important as guns. This is the reason for which they are often conjured up hastily and often inappropriately, whether they fit or not, as long as they are there. Then they lead man to the place where he forgets them, eye to eye with his foe.

*October 28, 1915*

If the world was created from a fiery shape, Flanders is an exception—an obvious patch out of another completely waterlogged cosmos. The wetness is immeasurable. When I write this down I repeat myself, but it would be doing the wetness an injustice if I did not once again assert that it is immeasurable. No one would believe that God is all-merciful if it were not repeated to him often enough.

*Same place, same date*

Winter quarters in the Oil Mill. The table at which we sit is round. A subaltern who was seconded as A.D.C. at the beginning of the War has come back at last, so there are now five of us. With a few candles burning in a smallish room it is really quite pleasant in contrast to the weather outdoors.

The owners of the Oil Mill, a man and his wife—the children are in Brussels under safe guardianship—are most charming and industrious people. He is losing a fortune through the



War, and it pains this active man to see his big factory standing idle, to have ships lying idle in the port of Antwerp, their cargoes having been confiscated by the Germans; and yet to have to pay wharfage on these ships. Neither he nor she allow themselves to get despondent. They do not even have to fight with the rising tide of indignation. She busies herself the whole day and he does what can be done. The wife is doing her best to make life pleasant for us, the invaders. Without a word from us she puts fruit on the table readily, as if we were her guests, a few flowers; sews up the split seam of a tunic; sees to our washing, cleanliness, and order in our quarters. To-day she is making quince jam. One of our company said that he found the smell delightful; she replied that it was a custom of the country to put a fruit among the linen. He said that he had heard something of the sort and the conversation changed. Next day we found that she had quietly put a quince among his handkerchiefs. All this is done unobtrusively and kindly—not with any familiarity or coquetry. She would do the same for any of us as she did for him.

Both she and her maid are of the Flemish type that I always admired: both very large, heavy and sweeping in their movements, very strong and enduring, healthy and simple, frank and self-confident.

WEST FLANDERS, *November 10, 1915*

One seeks salvation. Being in danger of hurt, one seeks, as always, holy ground. So I hit upon Plato, as a woman happened to write me about him; she seems to need him as an antidote to Nietzsche, otherwise her oracle. So the superman and the "best man" stand face to face. The latter is, indeed, a very flat and inadequate translation of the Greek *Aristos*, which would perhaps be rendered best by the most distinguished, the most noble, the most highly born; perhaps, indeed, with "thoroughbred," as applied to horses. Plato wants the "thoroughbred," Nietzsche the "superman." Nietzsche wants an exception; he really takes it for himself. His requirement



is egotistical. Plato wants the absolute constant unvarying good, the separation of the degenerate, and no exceptions. From the point of view of the head of a State the superman is far less important than the thoroughbred on which he can rely through generations. It is very significant that first the Arabians—that is, the most cultivated mathematicians—then the English, who admire everything durable, have bred blood horses; that is, a type of horse bred from a choice of the best with moderate in-breeding, which has the quality of being no longer susceptible to the influence of foreign strains and does not degenerate or approximate to the local type.

To . . .

*Same place, same date*

. . . And the War still goes on and it will keep on. Oh, a long time yet! You look in the glass and find a line by your mouth that is hard and displeases you. You will have to bear with this: it will be on many mouths.

To . . .

*November 21, 1915*

Perhaps wars may be won, perhaps this one may, by letters from home; I would rather not use the word "lost." For certainly small things also have their invisible effect. Otherwise a General would not be so confoundedly particular, for instance, that the lower edge of the men's caps should be absolutely horizontal, so that when many soldiers are dressed in line a broad, even, and very tiresome stripe of red faces runs between the parallels of the grey collars and caps, as if drawn with an oily pen. Or he would not get into an ecstasy of curses over an undone button. Reasonable men, good Company Commanders, can give instruction on this point. These things are important, so they say: the missing button behind the front means a missing bomb in the line. If the fellow forgets his button here he will forget his ammunition up there. If he has his cap over one ear here the blade

of his foresight will not be in the centre of the backsight at the front.

This is probably right. And therefore wars may be won by letters from home, just as much as they may be won by those perfectly horizontal cap-bands and the correct number of buttons. As it is now one notices the effect of cheering letters. They bring one on a bit farther through the winter and the stagnation; it is easier to be a stone in the great wall of the west by thinking how important one is as only stones in a wall can do. In this way every human ambition is paralysed and completely suppressed, and one lives on well pleased with one's stony existence and the satisfaction of annoying the enemy.

*December 1, 1915*

After a few days of beautiful frost we have returned to our former condition of complete wetness. Even though the storms behave like raging beasts that sit upon the clouds, drive them down and often fling them like monstrous sacks upon the land so that they splash, yet there are always fresh clouds to bring fresh downpours. One still takes the horses out of the stable for various duties and exercise in spite of the weather; but the happiness of this earth is not on the back of a horse in these times.

When they speak anxiously at home of the calling up of the Falstaff Guards it does not worry me, for the men that you see called up will certainly not be sent to the fighting troops. They will do duty in the Supply Columns of the Lines of Communication, and in a thousand places of which we know nothing. Our regiments on the other hand, whose losses have only been slight recently, are in very good form, both as regards the men and their training. Work is being done. The officers are a bit young and could be better, compared with the men. But we have once more a large number of officers who would do anything—God knows where they come from!

For some time it looked very different.

*December 8, 1915*

There seems to be no doubt about it—there are females in Germany who are bemoaning their fate and wringing their hands because they have no butter to put on their bread in the morning. Yet these same females bear it heroically when their sons are lying in trenches under shellfire. This gives me other ideas on the heroism at home, about which we have heard so much, and gives this virtue rather a rancid taste.

*December 12, 1915*

In the trenches and dug-outs the men are literally lying in the water. Imagine man and beast, wagons and guns, columns and columns, that pass by continually dripping; that they allow no other thought to emerge except dripping—a permanent dripping is as abominable as a permanent stink, permanent military music, or permanent itching; then you must admit that it plays its part as an important factor in war. The cheerlessness of the picture adds to the cheerlessness of the event. Nor do people get any pleasanter. They get unjust and curse the War just because it is raining.

Then too, because we know that we have been abandoned by the spirit of the event in its best sense, there comes a moment in war where two forces no longer oppose each other, of which one must be victorious, but when both are so used up that they beat blindly at each other, getting weaker every day, until they both fall down.

We feel like condemned men, and though we tell each other that at the first "Forward!" all that which is now dormant within us would arise again, yet we no longer believe that the word will come.

Enthusiasm is dying bit by bit. It is losing its resiliency like a spring that has been compressed too long in the same position.

That is what distinguishes this War—on all fronts, in every theatre of war, the feeling of insufficiency. No one has strength enough. We have successes, but no success; never a Sedan, a Cannae, a Waterloo, or a Chemulpo. It is certainly remark-

able that neither Germans nor Russians, French, English, or Italians have ever succeeded in overcoming inadequacy anywhere, although there have been hundreds of opportunities.

It may be that there is not a single General alive to-day who knows how to use armies that are numbered in millions. One hears that there are people who can only count up to three. The Fuegian can count up to five, as many fingers as he has on his hand. Many Company Commanders can really only count up to one hundred, the sum of their cohort. I know men myself who could do anything with one regiment, but nothing with two. And history teaches us that there have been men who could do this and that with one hundred thousand men, but could not move three hundred thousand.

Looking at all Commanders I still believe that Moltke was the greatest—greater than Hannibal, Napoleon, or Frederick the Great. It is said that he had luck. But when you look closer into the matter you find that this is not the case; his plans were upset by the unforeseen, just like others. One must consider how, in the first days of August 1870, one Army Commander came too early and one too late, how one army crossed the line of march of the other owing to a misunderstanding, to find that he had a way out of every difficulty and that his plans were never threatened by the unforeseen. At Sedan his army lay with its back to Paris; at Königgrätz the columns of his army got so tied up contrary to plan that he did not achieve the result he expected until three in the afternoon. To achieve his end he always had a way out, a hundred ways out. That distinguishes him from all the others.

*December 19, 1915*

There was a little hope in the air. Our division tried out a new gas, followed by an attack. But the English received the gas with a "Hip, hip, hurrah!" and the patrols that followed found the enemy positions bristling with bayonets, so that it was unnecessary further to probe the effects of the new means of offence. We lost one killed and four wounded—besides the lovely gas. Everyone is glad of that. The men

do not want to hear the word "gas" mentioned; they are fed up with stinks.

*December 23, 1915*

A military Christmas celebration that surpasses anything imaginable. Orders for a "worthy distribution of gifts," sharing out, checking, acknowledging receipt, drawing *Liebesgaben*; keeping them for men on command and more such stuff.

WEST FLANDERS, *December 25, 1915*

Men are strange beings, indeed! Those at home make such a fuss about the Christmas feast and Christmas gifts for the troops that one would expect a corresponding effect on those who are most concerned. But when you see the soldiers, dressed in their ranks about the Christmas board, for each man a knife, a piece of soap, socks, cigars, or cigarettes, heaped in neat piles and likewise dressed by the right—it is unfortunate that you have not the slightest idea how they are taking it. You do not know whether they are glad, whether they appreciate the gifts or not, whether they are grateful or not, whether they feel inwardly festive or whether Christmas did not matter so long as they got knives, cigars, and soap. Most of them seem to take it as though they were entitled to the Christmas gifts, and everything else that is done for them in the same way as their pay and clothing. Their expressions are exactly the same as when the Sergeant-Major is issuing pantaloons, cord, and the "happy crowding round the long Christmas table" is a padre's fable. Christmas can only be celebrated properly by a few, in their family and their own home. Apart from this it is so decidedly the Feast of Children or for children that grown-up men alone come off rather badly.

The Christmas parties that are given in peace-time in the cause of charity already suffer from the mass of those who receive gifts. But to give Christmas parties for soldiers is to murder the whole beautiful idea.



So one is satisfied if one can say: It was quite nice.

Well, it really was so yesterday. Our canteen, which calls itself "The Hessian Horseman," had just been opened; its sign represents a marvellous green-and-white painted dragoon on a spirited brown horse. The tables for the men were arranged in a large room with those for the N.C.O.'s adjoining. A huge wreath of ilex, stuck full of candles, hung from the ceiling. At one end stood the Christmas-tree. We had taken pains to eliminate everything useless and trashy from the presents—the sort of stuff that is brought to the front in impersonal cargoes by *Liebesgaben* messengers, as a reward for which these blighters are allowed into the line—the second line, of course; they have lunch with the C.O. and come home as heroes.

After a short speech all joined with enthusiasm in a cheer for Germany, which is easy to understand, as they cannot raise any enthusiasm for anything else. Then the presents were distributed. The Sergeant-Major had the bright idea of laying the knives, which were a gift from the officers to the men, on top of the piles, so that as many as possible fell down, causing much fumbling about under the crazy tables. For the knives sprang gaily around the room, thanks to their steely qualities. Then twenty men who were especially short of relations and consequently of gifts each received a sum of money; whereat they clicked their spurs and turned smartly about, as at squadron pay. Then we had a funny lottery for the N.C.O.'s which brought to the surface all their latent humour; that is to say, none at all. For the lottery was not in the book of words. They appreciate beer better than bright ideas.

Somewhat later I went into Headquarters kitchen, in which the lady of the house was giving her friendly help and the savoury aroma of a roasting turkey obtruded itself. Oysters strove in vain to resist the opening knife; two bottles of Burgundy tried to warm themselves, while two of champagne did their best to keep cool. The latter received reinforcements during the course of the evening.

A real little Black Forest fir stood in our little anteroom.



Real wax candles were burning on an ilex-wreath as big as a wagon-wheel over the central table. My young subalterns, who have just got their commissions, were resplendent in their new tunics and delighted with themselves and the feast. They had all taken pictures of my horse, and, what was particularly charming, of characteristic landscapes: all very nicely thought out and very heartily offered.

The schoolboy Johann Bies, of Wald-Holzbach, Post Losheim, Kreis Merzig, wrote me a letter in which he expressed the hope that I would return home safely; he enclosed a few apples and a stick of chewing-tobacco. Of course, the black soup of the Spartans cannot compete with chewing tobacco. I tried to tackle it last night after the turkey and the Burgundy, but found that I was not yet strong enough; besides, I had had enough to eat.

And that is how we spent our Christmas. I do not know whether it corresponds to the ideas of people at home. But it did not arouse such a feeling of antagonism in me as the last one. The first aeroplane and the first War Christmas are different from the second aeroplane and the second War Christmas. The gap between the idea of the Festival and the reality was still there, indeed; but the bridges that we built last year were still standing. We crossed them as if things had always been so.

#### WEST FLANDERS, *End of* 1915

I do not know whether it is the case everywhere, but here, at least, there is a certain patrol pride in the guerilla warfare between man and man—a certain Indian wildness and courage on both sides. I don't know who started it. Not content with shooting up the hostile patrol, they feel that they must bring in the body of the foe they have slain. In the burst of firing that follows the first shots they haul it back to their own lines as a sort of trophy. The perishers don't bother to report that they have seen this or that; they must have loot of some sort to show. A shoulder-strap or a bayonet, or, still better, a corpse.

To . . .

*December 28, 1915*

Dearest friend,—I should love to send you at least three Kings like those that came out of the East to brighten your New Year! This has always been the homage I prefer. But I have no Kings; and if I had any they would not be holy enough for you. I have only a good word. But I may not fail to express my heartfelt wish that we may all be of good courage.

WEST FLANDERS, *January 4, 1916*

I don't expect that I will have the luck to get to Egypt. It would be for me alone in any case. It is hardly likely that German units will be sent from here against "England's throat." Seeckt, who is in correspondence with R.-T. here, says that even the English and French in Salonica can be left to the Bulgarians. We do not know yet whether Seeckt will be Chief of Staff in charge of these far-off operations. He seems to be one of the cleverest men we have. R.-T. has promised to introduce me to him.

The colossal staging of the big synchronized attacks in the Balkans makes one aware of the presence of a very superior intellect. To natures like that of Seeckt it is a matter of indifference if Mackensen is acclaimed by the multitude; those who understand know that Seeckt and not Mackensen was responsible.

By the way, there is a German division nearly on the Black Sea, in the midst of the Bulgars. Apparently they are only there for show at present. The men have been issued with new uniforms, the horses are bursting with energy, and they go in for ceremonial parades and bean-feasts. I heard this from one of my officers, whose brother is down there.

One storm follows another here. The clouds race across the sky; but the pursuer always catches up. He seizes whole herds of clouds and flings them on to the country with one stroke, so that everything is dripping from their downpour.

The only shelter against the wind, the poplars round the farms and along the roads, have been pitilessly butchered. Even these poor bits of wood are needed for wretched planks. The whole character of the country has been altered by the removal of these distinctive landmarks. But the War does not care.

The front is still. Now and then the thunder of the guns arises in wrath and mingles with the howling of the storms.

*January 6, 1916*

Speaking of reprisals, it occurs to me again what a deplorable thing is this I'll-do-to-you-what-you-do-to-me, how low, savage, and brutal is the principle of reprisals. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is somewhat different. Eye is set off against eye, tooth against tooth, and blood against blood. It is not an ethical law, not an ethical point of view; it stood outside of jurisprudence, it was a rule of war, not a law of war. It is justified by primitive equity. Whether one who has blinded another should suffer the same as the inflicted does not rest upon the judgment of man. But this as-you-do-to-me-so-I'll-do-to-you rests upon the judgment of man, and here lies the chief fault. Whether I return good or ill, I begin by reckoning the significance of retribution. The Jews reckon because their God reckons. He is the God of retribution. He punishes and rewards—in retribution. How base, that no one should carry his reward within himself! How foolish to punish only for the sake of vengeance! How much freer, untroubled, and affirmative our lives would be were this conception absent!

It displeases me even in war. "We bombed Rheims as a reprisal for an air raid on Freiburg," say the Germans. "We have taken the German Consul in Salonika prisoner as a reprisal for air raids on this town," say the English. To direct one's attention to revenge is to become dependent on others for one's deeds and really not to get anywhere at all.

*January 11, 1916*

I have been thinking lately of making my position a more active one, to make better use of my talents in the field, to get a job of some sort, and so forth. I talked it over with R.-T., who certainly commands one of the best battalions on the Western Front. For my first idea was to get an infantry battalion. But what did he say: "It is certainly a great satisfaction if one has the luck to have a good Regimental Commander, not an unpleasant Brigadier and useful comrades in the regiment. But look about at the regiments in your division. Some of the very best men, many good ones, at any rate, have not been able to stick it, or have gone because they were thoroughly disgusted, if I may say so. You are about the only man who is left to run his own show in peace. Why do you want to surrender your independence in order to be badgered about by some Brigadier who resents your not wearing gloves when it is raining? You, with the most amiable of G.O.C.'s, you who get along well with him and with everyone?"

His point of view did not appeal to me as ideal. But he told me that, on the contrary, it depended on me. Anyone was useful doing his own job. "Do you think that you could bear to see infantry officers riding," said he, "to lose your own horses? Be grateful for what Fate has given you."

Seriously speaking, it really is a fact that the infantry cannot do anything useful or constructive in the trenches, unless they are attacking or being attacked. But how often does that happen? An offensive is impossible for the moment, on either side. Each of us has learnt a lesson from the other; and should we really ever move forward again we will be there, too.

Interior economy, the posting of sentries, patrols in No-Man's-Land (which were even introduced for my unit), have all become unimportant, everyday matters. There is really no point of contact with the enemy. Crawling about on patrol is a kind of sport and certainly a good thing, like training young dogs. But it is a sport in which I should not be allowed to indulge. To stick out under a heavy bombardment is a

virtue indeed, but it is a necessity as well. The chief thing about drum-fire is that no one can go backwards or forwards; he would come out of the frying-pan into the fire. The only thing to do is to stop where you are; and that requires neither courage nor dash. One's line of conduct is dictated by necessity.

So we will stay where we are for the present.

I have been reading the diary of M. de Catt, reader to Frederick the Great. One begins to realize how much better our army is, how much braver the individual, how much more imaginative the whole. The so-called old Prussian Generals could swear no higher oath than by Frederick's Army. They didn't know any better. They have hung a halo on this army, which is quite a good thing. But you would speak differently if you could read these sketches, if you knew that Frederick greeted his runaway troops with the words: "Nothing can be done against cannon." And what sort of guns were they! And then: deserters, looters, brigades cut off, supine leaders; only the King, for ever leading patrols and reconnaissances.

WEST FLANDERS, *January 12, 1916*

Leave in sight. I will only be writing once more. What can I write? When one stands on a high mountain, waiting for light to appear in the East, one does not start telling long stories.

BUCHSCHLAG, *January 22, 1916*

I find everything in fair order at home—more or less in the same place. Gaul's little donkey with the big head stands on the writing-table and has not lost the power of his hind-legs to spurn the assaults of life and of time. I love and respect him for it.

WEST FLANDERS, *February 2, 1916*

There is a lot of clerical work to be done here now. Division has unfortunately sent in my name for the compiling of a memorandum on the "glorious deeds" of the Corps.



Certainly they are not without glory. But it is more than I can do to write a popular article about them, especially as they seem to me not to be finished yet.

They are going to start lectures in Ghent, too. Is there any sense in all this? . . .

The front has not changed at all. The guns fire on their appointed targets, at the appointed time, with the appointed ammunition. Tartarus, which affords eternal bailing with a sieve and the rolling uphill of a perpetually back-sliding stone as torments, could introduce this endless War, that repeats itself pitilessly, amongst its inventions.

*February 13, 1916*

Those who saw the thirty-five English prisoners that were captured in a trench in our divisional sector yesterday had an opportunity of inspecting the lowest and most venal stratum in England's population. "There *are* no such people," Jago would say. Crooked legs, rickety, alcoholic, degenerate, ill-bred, and poor to the last degree. If these are "Kitchener's," one can understand the effort to get other elements than this venal rubbish into the army by forced recruiting, otherwise conscription. The point of view of not-enough was not the only one to be considered; one could feel that not-good-enough plays a part. There is an immense and significant difference between this crowd and the first regular troops that we fought against in 1914. The equipment was very good, as usual. If one could show this batch in a state of nature to German soldiers everywhere, no one would have the slightest respect for his adversary any more. The officer contrasted favourably with his men.

*February 15, 1916*

I realize perfectly the lifelessness of all things about me here, how little there is that is pleasant; and that only the will to be superior to one's surroundings can overcome them. This thought makes one feel objectively because the subjective takes such a high value. It makes one feel objective



towards things; so that one realizes perfectly that the bed is cold, that the horses stagger before the storm, that one of them was blown into the ditch with his rider; that one's greatcoat gets torn into tatters; sometimes the storm blows a cloud of soot down the chimney; everything is black and dirty, and the fire refuses to burn in spite of all attention.

No great significance can be attached to our little successes here. But what Lünser (my chief patrol hero) tells me seems to be worthy of note: he says that the English never come out of their trenches now. That is at once interpreted as "lack of enterprise on the part of the enemy"—lovely expression. But I can interpret the interpretation: that lazy alcoholics, the scum of East London are lying opposite us. The better troops, the real troops, are elsewhere.

February 17, 1916

The English *communiqués* deny the loss of forty prisoners. Not that it really matters either way; but I saw the fellows with my own eyes. And it is rather a poor show if they can say that forty men are *not* missing. If it were more important we ought to publish their names.

The forty Englishmen captured at Pilkem are:—

1. Captain Purkins.
2. Sergeant I. G. Miller.
3. Private Falstaff, etc.

February 18, 1916

In April 1915 a man of my squadron was killed up at Pilkem. The carpenter made the usual wooden cross for his grave. Orderly and thorough as the man is, he made another cross—for stock. It stood about for a long time. When we left Houthulst Forest it came with us. It is still lying about—waiting. There are some very provident souls about!

February 23, 1916

To get out of the habit of riding is the reverse of refreshing. The day before yesterday no oats at all were issued for the

horses for three days—only some maize; and no straw either—only some sort of rushes. By the time we have accustomed the horses to eating nothing at all they will be dead. The willows that we have been hoping for cannot be used before the middle of March in this country—at least not for horses. The cattle are out of doors day and night; but they have the gift of ruminating and they must need to ruminate pretty often.

Although we pull through in spite of all this, we do so with periods of under-nourishment. For the present only the beasts are affected; later it will be the turn of the men.

I feel that I must record what a brave woman at home said to her children: “You can read one of Goethe’s poems when you have no butter. Other children can’t do that.”

*February 26, 1916*

I have a feeling that the attack at Verdun must succeed—succeed, not because of the number of guns and attacking troops, but because of the more general reason that war must be directed in the last resource, not against positions and armies, not against a State, but against human weaknesses. When they appear there is no more hope. The French are abandoning absolutely impregnable positions. No trip to Rome, no Council of War, no talk of glory, and no Army Order can prevail against that.

It may take a long time yet. Of course this feeling does not portend the end of the War by a long way, particularly against a coalition. Thanks to her command of the seas England will take less notice of it than anyone. That cannot be helped at present. But when Verdun falls—and I believe, subject to reserves, that it will fall—the Frenchman will lose the butter off his war-bread to say the least; and I doubt whether he will still care to eat it then.

On the other hand, we are beginning to feel—as you mention in your letter—“that the lot of a German is not an enviable one in these days.” That will be true of us, not only to-day, in the midst of the War, but to-morrow, after the Peace or half-peace; I don’t know which it will be.

WEST FLANDERS, *March 1, 1916*

I am giving lectures to young officers three days a week on the spirit of Field Service Regulations, which is still certainly the real spirit of the War, and also on another theme, "The Conduct and Behaviour of the Mounted Officer." The lectures are given in Ghent, and the trip there from my quarters at the Front is rather a nuisance. The attentive faces of my young listeners are a pleasing sight. The lecture-room is in the University. Up to the present the preparation of the lectures takes up an undue amount of time and trouble.

On this point it is interesting to compare the spirit of the French Field Service Regulations with that of ours. What characterizes the spirit of the German Regulations is the following paragraph (38):—

"Determined action remains the first requirement in war. Everyone—the highest Commander and the youngest soldier—must realize that he will incur more blame for neglecting opportunities than for making mistakes in his choice of methods."

This is incredibly bold! To bracket the youngest soldier with the highest commander! To demand such a thing from an army of millions! The French cannot imitate us there. Their Field Service Regulations contain nothing of the kind.

Such a requirement reads as a matter of course; but one need only consider the course of the War of the Bavarian Succession to see that it was not always thus; "determined action" was not always felt to be the first requirement of war.

Such thoughts as these are not, I think, useless.

*March 5, 1916*

It has recently come to light that one of my men by the name of W., who was sent out with a strong patrol on the line Moorslede–Langemarck on October 11, 1914, was ill-used and clubbed to death by natives after he had been severely wounded. The patrol was fired on; one man was

killed, one horse shot dead, and another wounded. W. was shot in the knee and fell from his horse. A sergeant of the patrol tried to bring him along on his horse, but could not get him up and had to leave him lying under the fire of the enemy. As soon as the German patrol had gone the Belgian peasants and factory hands of the neighbourhood came up (this happened on a Sunday), surrounded the dragoon, knocked him about, and went through his pockets. He managed to turn on his stomach. Then a brute who was notorious in the neighbourhood beat out his brains with the butt of his own carbine, which had been taken from him. This came to light through conversations in the *Überwachungsstelle* at Kortryk (Courtrai), where suspicious characters are always being rounded up. A peasant had seen it from his house; and a girl, who was standing by at the time, knew the murderer and the thief by name and gave them away. They have been caught; they will certainly be sentenced to death. The peasant and the girl gave their evidence after they had been assured that they would be placed under military protection.

At that time we still had an incomplete idea of the rage of the Belgians. It is a good thing that the charge is only substantiated by the evidence of Belgian witnesses; otherwise it would be branded as another German lie.

On October 19th the Division went past the point where this man and his comrade had been killed and the patrol fired on. We made haste to investigate, but found neither corpses nor graves. So we thought for a long time that the wounded man had been picked up by the English. Later, various rumours gave us reason to believe, or at least to hope, that he had died in the English hospital at Moorslede on the following day. The reason we did not find the two bodies was that the farmer, in front of whose farm they were lying, sent to the Burgomaster early on the morning of the 19th to ask him what should be done with the dead Germans. He was advised to bury them as best he could, and a farm-hand dug a hole for them behind a hedge.

March 15, 1916

I have been very depressed since we have been hung up in front of Verdun. Just because I said to myself that a show like the one that was planned there may go wrong; it cannot go so far wrong that we should only take one fort. The French are quite unperturbed. The German newspaper headlines "Anxiety over Verdun in Paris," and suchlike, are pure inventions, attempting to twist the perfectly sensible and cool-headed considerations of these people into expressions of anxiety. The offensive has got stuck at its beginnings. If they say now that we did not want any more than we have achieved—that is, to shoot the fortress to pieces—it is simply childish and expects childish credulity on our part.

Although the preparation for the attack on Verdun was magnificent and everything ran smoothly as regards the preparations, yet something was missing in the final calculation: a bit of conviction was lacking somewhere—perhaps only at the last moment—as if the sword had been sharpened to too fine a point for this thrust. But really, very fine! for instance, the concentration of twenty corps near Arras and the sudden swinging round of all this force to bear on Verdun; then again, the mounting of the heavy guns so as to be able to draw on Metz for ammunition supply. It may be that all this was just not simple enough. "Everything is simple in war; but simplicity is difficult."

Lünser has received the Iron Cross for his cheeky patrols at last. As it took Division rather a long time to make up their mind and the decoration was a long time coming, I presented him with a pair of spurs on squadron mounted parade. He received them with delight; and then, in his richest Cologne dialect: "I'd like to recommend myself for the next go of duty in the line!"

The rats are a great nuisance in the trenches. One warrior felt himself moved to watch the way in which a rat would catch itself in the trap he had set. But the rat did not want to have an audience and stayed away. The *Landwehrmann* got tired of waiting; so he lay down on his back and set the trap



on his stomach, thus he would be gently awakened by the rat scrambling up and would miss neither his sleep nor the spectacle. Suddenly there was a terrific crack; the *Landwehrmann* started up, hoping that he had caught the beast. But he flung the trap into a corner, disappointed; it was only a shell that had struck in the board-revetting behind him.

March 19, 1916

Spring has come at last and is spreading itself like a cuckoo in the nest, although mankind feels differently about it. One cannot say that it takes precedence of the War. One feels like a man who has been seized by a shark from underneath, whilst the upper part of his body is still above water; and, he is supposed to show a smiling face just because the weather is fine.

WEST FLANDERS, April 4, 1916

We are still expecting the English. That is the newest news I noticed amongst the same old stuff. To begin with, the hostile 'planes are very active at night. For this reason a new darkness has been ordered over the land; and when anyone has to light a match he holds his hand over it so that he will not get a bomb dropped on him. It is true that our troops had got very careless in this respect, and that hutments, occupied villages, and stations were all kept well lighted up and easy to find—in contrast to the practical English, who keep everything carefully in darkness, as our flying men report.

WEST FLANDERS, April 8, 1916

I have often had to wait for many and great things, for the clearing up of my own ideas, for a thousand things, and finally, for myself; and yet it seems lighter to bear than the silence behind me, the lack of news, and the bated breath behind me. I would never have believed it, and ask myself why it is? It is true. This is no longer a journey to the wars; no adventure that releases a man from everything, leaving

him only the foot's breadth of earth on which he stands with his weapon in his hand, perhaps with his horse. We have both bored our way into a rock; strength and tools are still working forward, striking on impenetrable rock. Only the shaft behind us leads back to freedom and still gives us air. When one hears no sound and feels no breath of air from there for days on end it gets narrow. Then the rock weighs heavy on one's brow; then it is cold and dead around. . . .

WEST FLANDERS, *April 10, 1916*

Now and then one finds unexpectedly a silent Community of Saints that one would like to belong to oneself. Knut Hamsum seems to be such an one to me. Indeed, he does not sit "on the mountains," yet in a hermitage on an island. This must be the same thing for him as the mountain is for me.

When peace comes we must look him up on his island. It lies far from the sun. But the attitude of this man seems to me to be all the more remarkable.

*Same place, same date*

Our conduct must depend on the consideration or decision whether we are heading for starvation or hunger. If they can starve us out any continuation of the War is criminal folly, as we are already convinced of the impossibility of a military decision in the near future. If hunger is all that we have to face, even the hunger of millions, the momentary impossibility of effecting a decision, cannot justify our throwing up the sponge. We will go hungry—all of us, except those without conscience, who, I hope, will then fall off, like ticks from a dog that has got too lean for parasites. It is true—many of the poor will go hungry; I know it.

*To . . .*

WEST FLANDERS, *April 13, 1916*

I wonder whether it is true, this impression that you have brought back from Berlin: that as a result of the War every-

one has enough to do to look after himself and for this reason takes little interest in his neighbour? I rather believe that interest in the destiny of others, even of relations, even so-called friends, was never very great, or was only characteristic of a few. What used to pass for sympathy is all too superficial to stand in the face of present events. Something is changing. What was it, then, that enabled people to find each other? Not in their cares, in their manifestations and their experiences. When one considers it carefully does it not seem strangely futile to say of a person that I had tea with him, that I went to the theatre with him, that I had dinner with him? And yet that is typical of what is called knowing him. Indeed, it is not given to everyone to communicate himself so that one gets a share of his innermost feelings. But people have got into the habit of limiting their feelings of sympathy to such an extent that one ends by losing the way to one's neighbour; one cannot tread his paths because they are overgrown; he is hard to find, perhaps rather dull at first, and in any case demands initiative.

I believe that the War is only a self-made cloak for the lack or absence of sympathy amongst those who used to associate with each other. Society, as one rightly feels to-day, is insufficient; it cannot be justified nowadays. Everything was superficial. No one took the trouble to get to know their friends before. Who can manage to do it now?

*Same place, same date*

Still the English do not arrive. Colonel Repington has expressed the opinion that all one could expect from the British Army was to repel an attack in the same way that the French have done at Verdun. And there is no doubt that they would have done so had the attack taken place at Ypres instead of Verdun. So that we may wait a long time yet for Tommy. Falstaff could have argued no better or more gloriously.

To . . .

WEST FLANDERS, *April* 18, 1916

There is nothing much to be said against the proofs and the picture that you show of declining culture—in fact, it is desperately true. I only find your conclusion false in point of time. There will be a decline. If it takes place within a term of years and not of generations, it will probably be rather fortunate than otherwise. Greater appreciation of one's own—one's own handiwork, one's own capacity, one's own art, one's own worth and value—many may compete to make up what culture and civilization has lost for the moment or for years. It is hardly possible to draw the balance of relative profit and loss now; but it is hardly possible that a decline like the one that followed the Thirty Years War should repeat itself. International and national relationships and dependency are too great for that; even the life of our State is penetrated by too many nourishing saps for that. A woman dressed in rare exotic stuffs, with flowers, with her delicate lace and her jewels as a product of high cultivation and a certain degree of riches, is certainly a sign of inward well-being, one could almost say of inward propriety and morality. The entire absence of these characteristics, the lowering of her personality to the washtub and the cooking-pot, is, if insisted on, the sign of inward poverty or else a waste of values—as if one were to make a fire with beautiful furniture or fiddles because there was no other wood to hand.

WEST FLANDERS, *April* 23, 1916

The one hundred and eight English prisoners that you have seen reported in the papers—we did not take them all—were so clean that we could have tucked them away as Easter eggs. They had beautiful steel helmets and splendid jerkins of leather lined with wool, which we kept, of course, but they are clever enough not to try a straightforward attack. We are no longer counting on it, and the leave trains are running as in the most peaceful times of this so-called war.

To . . .

*Same place, same date*

. . . One can get sad over quite different things. For instance, I read a poem yesterday, and I swear to you that the man who could write such a poem was a poet by the grace of all the gods. But he is dead; he was killed in the autumn of 1914 on the Western Front. His name was Ernst Stadler, born in August 1883, in Kolmar.

But here is the poem; it seems to me so splendid that I am very sad that he will never write one again. Here it is:

### FAHRT ÜBER DIE KÖLNER RHEINBRÜCKE BEI NACHT

Der Schnellzug tastet sich und stösst die Dunkelheit entlang.  
Kein Stern will vor. Die ganze Welt ist nur ein enger, nach-  
umschienter Minengang,  
Darein zuweilen Förderstellen blauen Lichtes jähe Horizonte  
reissen: Feuerkreis  
Von Kugellampen, Dächern, Schloten, dampfend, strömend  
. . . nur sekundenweis' . . .  
Und wieder alles schwarz. Als führen wir ins Eingeweid'  
der Nacht zur Schicht.  
Nun taumeln Lichter her . . . verirrt, trostlos vereinsamt  
. . . und sammeln sich . . . und werden dicht.  
Gerippe grauer Häuserfronten liegen bloss, im Zwiçlicht  
bleichend, tot—etwas muss kommen . . . oh, ich fühl'  
es schwer  
Im Hirn. Eine Beklemmung singt im Blut. Dann dröhnt der  
Boden plötzlich wie ein Meer:  
Wir fliegen, aufgehoben, königlich durch nachtentrissne Luft  
hoch überm Strom. O Biegung der Millionen Lichter,  
stumme Wacht,  
Vor deren blitzender Parade schwer die Wasser abwärts rollen.  
Endloses Spalier, zum Gruss gestellt bei Nacht!  
Wie Fackeln stürmend! Freudiges! Salut von Schiffen über  
blauer See! Bestirntes Fest!



Wimmelnd, mit hellen Augen hingedrängt! Bis wo die Stadt  
mit letzten Häusern ihren Gast entlässt.

Und dann die langen Einsamkeiten. Nackte Ufer. Stille.  
Nacht. Besinnung. Einkehr. Kommunion. Und Glut  
und Drang

Zum Letzten, Segnenden. Zum Zeugungsfest. Zur Woll-lust.  
Zum Gebet. Zum Meer. Zum Untergang.

The man is dead; what one would give to bring him back to life! But others remain and will not be killed, although they can sing of nothing but their lecherous blood and the greasy grimaces of their cushions. But when one is overcome by a great and natural disgust—see, there comes a Stadler with whom one “flies, flowery exalted, kinglike through night-enfolded air, high over the stream.”

WEST FLANDERS, *April 30, 1916*

Mankind has always shown a special gift to prove the sense of nonsense. As far as I know the burghers of Schilda became masters in this. What is happening at this time is so like the Schildburghers, savouring of the round table in a pub., that I have got a horror of all the works of the middle-class, which is the father of Schilda and of the round table. The whole War reeks of the stockpot; one looks round for a window to let in some fresh air. Not that we have a monopoly of Schilda—Wilson and Asquith, Briand and Sazonoff, Salandra and Skuludis are blessed with it—each in his own country. The middle classes are certainly the most conceited stratum of the State and of civilization. They celebrate triumphs: and that takes the gilt off the gingerbread! I often look towards the gaols to see whether some great criminal mind might not be hidden there that one could release, in order to make something happen—whether good or bad. Unfortunately such people have been prudently decapitated. It is quite right that the most unpleasant thing about a criminal is his head.

One <sup>can</sup> cannot make history or wage war with a middle-class

morality. I am glad that war and history refuse to endure that. So something remains in the world that cannot be reduced to the level of the bourgeoisie.

*May 7, 1916*

How can one bear it: this German shriek for sympathy to America: "Look how cruel it is! England is trying to starve millions of women and children to death!" How can one reconcile this, one asks, with the big talk they give us about the ineffectiveness of this attempted starvation? And as if we would not starve out all England in cold blood until the thinnest English miss fell through her skirts!

Why start a submarine war—for we started it—if one cannot carry it on effectively? There is really no purpose in it; and for this reason Wilson is quite right when he demands that we should give it up. But this wretched attempt to prove that it really is some use is enough to make one rage. When a submarine sinks an English herring-boat there are huge headlines in the papers about "Fresh successes in the submarine war." But when—as actually happened—the Cunard Line buys up the entire fleet of the Canadian Transatlantic Steamship Company in one single deal, it is in the papers, of course; but as it is no "success" for us, and might give people ideas about the senselessness of swallowing the trawler as a success, they prefer not to comment on it.

*WEST FLANDERS, May 20, 1916*

I paid a visit to R.-T., who has been lent with his battalion to a neighbouring regular corps. He laughed immoderately when I tried to interest him in the quest of the saving "criminal genius."

Unfortunately we do not seem to be doing badly enough at the present to appreciate the need for great genius. Indeed, it would seem that we even have too many sound men, and the fact that they are inconvenient is sufficient to justify their dismissal; and servile mediocrity is all that remains.

The following is a case in point. Major Von E. remanded a man for a divisional court-martial for punishment for failing

to carry out an order. His report brought a question from the court whether the accused had received a special order to carry out a duty as laid down in the ordinary course. Reply in writing: No. He did not keep a nursemaid for everybody in his regiment. On this point I must say that Von E. is known as a commander who is rather plain-spoken and can allow himself a certain amount of latitude on this point. But the divisional commander, Von K., resented this remark and put the Major under arrest for five days. This was neither clever nor appropriate. It would have been quite enough to say: "Kindly refrain from such remarks." Von E. complained of Von K. to Corps Headquarters, who referred to higher authority. But Von K.'s position was already undermined by G.O.C. Corps, as he is a much more intelligent and industrious man, and he only wanted one more push, which the G.O.C. took the opportunity to give him. Von E. was justified along the whole line "quite properly so," and Von K. was dismissed for his mistake! It is a crime! Not only against the man, but because inferiority has triumphed over superiority, and a puss-in-boots, a very pompous climber and hunter of distinctions, has managed to beat a really good General. Von K. was certainly hard on many people. But even those that were roughly treated by him, Von E. himself, recognize unanimously what a good man he was. I have heard him speak and seen him at work, and I was very glad to have this General as a neighbour on the front amongst the crowd of brass-hats. Officers and men both had confidence in him. One cannot say the same of the victor in the contest.

The sufferer writes with bitterness, feeling such genuine sorrow that one feels it painfully oneself.

That is how matters stand. This case is only one symptom; there are plenty of them. And I hope that this letter will be intercepted, and that the Kaiser, who signed the dismissal of this officer, will learn that he is creating dissatisfaction, that he is killing the spirit and is surrounded by tools like—well, like an artisan.

The Corps Commander has had nearly enough rope. The

Von K. incident; the way he visits hospitals, where he orders the doctors to announce him in wards full of severely wounded and feverish men with the words: "Attention! His Excellency the Corps Commander"; his behaviour in the matter of decorations—he does not forward a recommendation for any distinction that he does not himself possess or of which he has not the higher grade; his sacrifices in front of Lange-marck; his courtiers and his staff of flunkies—he will hang himself one of these days.

As far as I am concerned myself I have one or two things laid up against him. I sent a message to him through his Adjutant declining to compose a panegyric on the "glorious deeds" of his Corps, to order.

"Why?" asked the Adjutant.

"Because to do anything of the kind one must take pleasure in it; but His Excellency is most successful in taking the pleasure out of anything."

I know that all this is not the worst part of the War; I wish it was. It is not even enough "to mistrust more deeply, to despise more deeply, to be alone more deeply than ever before"; but it is a justification to turn aside, to become indifferent, to look about for other things.

WEST FLANDERS, *June 2, 1916*

One unpleasantness is piling up on top of another. The Corps Commander, ill-advised on this point and lacking all the necessary vision, has ordered all the lances to be sent home by all squadrons in the Corps. As most of the Cavalry Divisions have been deprived of their swords they will be completely disarmed when mounted, if their lances are taken away. Any footpad, any fellow on the road, can get hold of the horseman's bridle and invite him to dismount. Every one of our patrols is delivered over helpless to any enemy patrol armed with the lance or sabre, and all they can do is to fly. For the cavalryman carries his carbine on his back; when he wants to use it, he must dismount and let his horse go whither it will.

So the latest hobby of this peacock is that the cavalry should in every case be provided with a weapon that they can only use on foot.

Of course, the point is not important at the moment. But as I cannot consent to the disarmament of my men I have resisted it and will continue to do so.

Anyone who wants to disarm my lads will have to fight me first. Up to the present I am going strong.

June 5, 1916

I feel very pleased with myself. I have won the battle about sending the lances home and disarming the cavalry, as such. I sent the order regarding the handing in of the lances to Division, with the remark that the A.C.I. regarding the return of lances to store did not apply here (*for the Ministry of War decides questions of armament*).

They had a good laugh over the incident at Divisional H.Q. Waldorf said: "Well, I shan't inspect you to find out whether you have lances or not," and laughed.

Soldiers have curious fads. I noticed this when we took over a small section of line. (We have to do this in three shifts, as a proportion of the men have to stay behind to look after the horses.) What thrills the men most in an undertaking is the prospect of loot. Recently a man who had wormed his way into an English trench brought an English razor back with him. The next night they came and volunteered in crowds to renew the experience. The most difficult thing in the world is to still their curiosity for the nice things they might take away with them when one gets into an enemy trench. A pot of English marmalade or a razor is more important to them than a British officer's notebook.

June 9, 1916

Kitchener is dead. After all, he was a man who had the body of the Mahdi dug up and decapitated, to fling the body into the Nile and send the head to Cairo; who decapitated Sheiks of incredible culture and more noble race than any



new-made English lord kneeling on their prayer-rugs; who destroyed a white people, descended from the Dutch, by the murder of women and children. Very remarkable as a man of power, but not really great. He sought glory in the destruction of small things and found it; subordinate beings whom another would probably have rapped across the knuckles.

To . . .

WEST FLANDERS, *June 15, 1916*

One can certainly shoot at the Philistines you very appropriately attack in your Whit-Sunday letter—but one can never hit them. Nietzsche tried to do so without success; they seem to be a vermin on the face of the earth that cannot be stamped out any more than other vermin.

Supported by a spell of dirty, low-down weather, which always gives the tone to human conditions here, thanks to its penetrating qualities, I too could have preached a Pentecostal sermon against anything that looks like Philistia. The War Philistine is a peculiar, armed variety of the species and is fairly common hereabouts. Still worse are the busybodies, the work-finding theorists, the people who want everything done at the same time, those who peacock with their decorations and those who collect them like magpies, the prudes, the Nosy-Parkers, the optimists, those who drag peace-time trash into the War, the smugly satisfied, the hurrah-shouters, the know-all dilettanti and many more; one could write another page of epithets. They are all harmful; and to undo the damage takes an army of people with sane common sense, which is the chief material in the making of a General or a soldier—at least, it should be.

Leave it alone! These three words could be carved on a temple, like "Know Thyself."

WEST FLANDERS, 1916

The Austrians are part of the pack of troubles we have to carry—considered as military allies. I am relieved to hear that Seeckt is going to take a hand there personally, but disquieted

to learn that troops had to be taken away from Verdun and even from here to be flung into the gap in Galicia. I have always suspected that the blighters have come to rely on us entirely to straighten out the dents in their sword-blade.

BRUGES, *July 9, 1916*

When I got back from leave to-day—there was no reason to refuse it to me after a fighting order inspection that drew praise even from Puss-in-Boots—I was met by the squadron factotum, my excellent cyclist, at the station. I knew at once that we had been moved to other billets.

The journey was very quick, but not exhilarating for body or soul. I got my connections in Cologne and Ghent all right, by making my timely arrival a matter of importance with the guards and getting them to put through trunk-calls to hold up the trains I wanted to take. The compartments were very full, and there are more snorers in the world than can be agreeable to a non-snorer. So I got little sleep and little opportunity to stretch myself; and the light was too bad to read.

And now for the bitter pill! A *Landsturm* battalion was wanted at the front and we have had to relieve them; an out-and-out Lines of Communication job—to guard the railway-lines Bruges-Ostend and Bruges-Thourout.

I refuse to stick out for long.

WEST FLANDERS, NEAR THE COAST, *July 13, 1916*

I read Fritz von Unruh's poem on Roye; it really did me good. So magnificently careless and casually powerful; not written for any market or any circle, but hewn out of Rage, Courage, Necessity, and Pleasure—and slung together. I like it.

WEST FLANDERS, *July 15, 1916*

This place would not be at all bad if one were to consider it as a summer holiday. In the morning we exercise the horses round the country or along the charming canal that leads

from Bruges to Ostend. It is bordered by high dykes, accompanied by rather broad, shady poplars.

At the present time they are shedding their downy seed in thousands of little snow-clouds over the dykes and into the water, where they form a sort of Milky Way on the margin, lightly undulating in the wavelets. The spotless little low houses lie in a land of willows, with their red roofs and their dark-red and white-painted doors and shutters, each one in a green nest of poplars and elms. Between them the numerous herds of cattle, white calves alternating with red-spotted and grey-blue beasts. The willow hedges are separated by little canals. From the high dykes one can look across the country to the far distance, where one senses the sea; along them the horses can stretch themselves at a gallop for miles on the green rides beside the towpaths. The parks of the châteaux are beautifully laid out and the clumps of huge copper-beeches spread themselves over the wide lawns. The gardens are split up with box-hedges four and five metres high; endless walls on which peach-trees climb like ivy at homes urround them. Everything shows signs of rich and selected horticulture. There are cherries of fantastic size, strawberries, raspberries—all kinds of vegetables and salads in quantities and all very good.

Ostend is twenty-five minutes away by rail; sea-bathing.

That is all very nice for a summer holiday. But—there is a war on and the effect of it is unbearable.

By the way, the fighting on the Somme strikes the observer as very unpromising, and is very depressing to one who is inactive. It is quite certain that the quality of the English troops that are being used there is superior to that of ours; up to the present they have had fewer losses.

The situation in Galicia is still very grave. Wherever there are German troops the line is held. But the brother of one of my subalterns who is Adjutant of an Infantry Brigade on that front has a tale to tell of his division being left in danger by the neighbouring Austrian divisions. "The Cossacks pushed on behind the Austrians, who gave ground without

there being any good reason for doing so, till they reached the defenceless transport lines and cut them up abominably."

NEAR OSTEND, *July* 17, 1916

It is horrible to feel that one no longer belongs to the fighting troops, not to be any longer in the region where one may be alarmed, in the possible zone of penetration of heavy attacks; to be instead far from one's own division, doing the duties of the half-lame and half-incompetent behind the Front, without knowing what is going on—at any rate, far from playing any part in the real War, from the thunder of the guns to which one belongs!

The whole trouble is that masses of infantry have had to be scratched up—even the *Landsturm* battalions whose real job was to protect the lines of communication, in order to put them as reserves behind a line that is already wearing very thin. Why cavalry units, full of young men eminently capable of being used as reserves, are not detailed for this duty is not apparent. Why don't they use men of the Ersatz formations who are fit for garrison duty for the work we are doing? There are plenty of people walking round at home who could do it without taking the cavalry away from where they could be more useful.

The matter does not affect me personally. It is perhaps bad luck that I happened to be away at the time; that my G.O.C. Division was also on leave at the time; that my second in command did not learn of the danger in time; and that I was unable to make use of my influence at Army Headquarters. But I feel that it would have been useless this time; all the cavalry in our corps has been used in the same way.

Of course, there are people who do not mind the change. They are the ones who like to have a good meal at Kasten's in Ostend—the former Ocean Hotel; to drink German beer in Brussels and to enjoy all the good fare of this neighbourhood that is still very rich; to live in more or less tastefully

built châteaux and to go for rides through a park-like landscape.

All very nice—if we were at peace. In wartime, very L. of C., unreal, insufficient, disquieting, loss and strain. If peace were suddenly to come one might not be able to notice it here. Of course, one would see it in the papers, but one would not feel the change in one's own body and soul.

To . . .

WEST FLANDERS, *July 19, 1916*

We—that is to say Lieutenant K. and I—ride along the canal dyke to Brussels or to Ostend, just as it happens. We saw the ships that we have taken in Ostend, the *Brussels* and the *Leicester*. So they were not only in the *communiqués*; old cargo barges, one cannot make much of them.

Submarines were exercising in the harbour; it was fascinating; the narrow grey backs disappeared under water in such a matter-of-fact way. When the boat came up again and the water poured off it the shining body, directed by invisible forces, moving about without any apparent crew, gave one a really uncanny impression. Then a port opens in the conning tower and out steps the commander followed by a couple of sailors and the magic is done. Everything becomes understandable. Understanding can grasp it without seeing the men, but that does not satisfy the eye; it likes to see what it is used to. Other submarines were just taking in torpedoes; they were lowered softly into their bodies as a pill in gelatine; but they seemed to have some difficulty in swallowing them. Every boat carries two torpedoes in its stomach, and every round costs 25,000 marks.

As a weapon they are uncanny. In stormy weather the oversea eye of the boat, the periscope, is hardly visible; and when it is pushed out to its full extent the boat is nine metres under water. If it goes deeper, the periscope sinks too. Then they often lie on the bottom for days on end, to go out seeking their prey at night like real monsters.



To . . .

*Same place, same date*

I am glad that you have taken lodgings in the neighbourhood, so that you are now free from this worry. The relations with the gardener are really delightful. I hope that it will not be suddenly destroyed by some clumsiness. For we know the fairy tale; one may associate with the most beautiful fairies and proudest ladies, princes and magic creatures, spirits and gods; if one asks them just one little thing too much, if one tries to learn something from them, the pleasant association is gone and they disappear. A wild garden full of colour, you alone tolerated in it by the Lord of the Secret, entrusted with the duty of picking the berries yourself, as if that were denied to him by some magic, that is really jolly nowadays. Will you break the old man's spell?

I had a charming letter yesterday from Von Unruh, to whom I had written a few words about his poem on Roye. I enclose it as I should like it to be well looked after. Of course, I wrote him nothing at all about "improving" and will certainly not attempt to help him to alter it! But I hope that the confessional character will disappear out of his work automatically later on.

Is it not delightful that a man like this can say to anyone, "May God keep your friendly feelings for me?" This sea of disappointments, these shipwrecks, these masts ever set up anew, these wild journeyings, ever new! This Beethovenesque disorder, the harmony within contrasting with the dissonance and raging discords without; that affected me so closely and strongly in his work too.

*Same place, same date*

Can a human being realize at this time what is to happen to this unfortunate continent that started out to rule the world? The War does not move, and peace is farther away than ever—a stupid senseless brawl without any trace of justification from necessity, from superfluous energy, from outstanding policy, from the creative power of any one person:

that will be written of this war! It is not mania but stupidity that rules that which was left of the spirit of mankind two years ago, and what is still left of it after two years. One can sympathize with insanity; with the stupidity cultivated for generations combined with presumption one cannot. What is so great about peoples who don't know when to begin and when to stop?

WEST FLANDERS, *July* 23, 1916

They have sent me an Ensign. His name is M. and he is a Legation Secretary. Since young J. got his commission with me, O. and K. are getting on well in their new jobs, and Koch has stood the fiery test of an A.D.C. with a difficult General, they seem to look on my unit as an incubator for young officers. As if I were the high school of St-Cyr. I don't know what to do with the Ensign. I no longer possess a formed unit, I cannot send him into a hail of bullets, and it is not my line to teach other people. Yet they all say that they learnt a lot when serving with me—God knows how.

I visited the so-called Tirpitz battery in Ostend yesterday. It consists of four long guns of a calibre of 28 centimetres that have a range of 31 kilometres. But the English have mounted a similar battery near Dunkirk and fire on our guns with such accuracy—they can easily spot them by aerial photography—that it is a miracle that the guns are still alive. Last Sunday they put over one hundred rounds at this enormous range right into the middle of the battery. The craters of their somewhat bigger shells are in some cases only two or three metres from the guns. There were some killed, many wounded, and scratches on the guns; but none of them got a direct hit.

Once again, these huge things are mounted so openly and carelessly as if asking to be shot at. Unturfed and uncovered embrasures, built up for the guns, lie at regular intervals in a nice straight line; and ten metres of gun-barrel stick out into the open from each of these constructions. As if there were no turf to cover it all up, no sand under which one

could hide such things, no cottage into which one could build these monsters. No! They have to be mounted openly like Christmas presents.

*To . . .*

WEST FLANDERS, *July 27, 1916*

I imagine that the woman who makes moan to you about her son every day in her own way is no Hecuba and that her son was no Hector. So she may be allowed to bear her sorrow in a different way from Queens who mourn their sons. Lone women, untaught by Fate, susceptible to the greatest joy, as they are to every kind of inward tumult; moving in narrow circles; cowering in their submission to a ready-made idol: these break up when they are struck by something not too overpowering, with a shrill cry like clay that has been overbaked. Unaccustomed to absorb anything within themselves as an expanding soul may do, they defend themselves by allowing the cup that is too full to overflow. Of course, they were as unrestrained in their happiness as this woman in her misfortune. One must allow a mother the egoism that makes her mourn her own son more than a Stadler or an Immelmann, Count Holck, Franz Marc, or a Radulph von Stedman.

To come to the point: where may we judge? It is certain that it comes as natural to this woman to manifest her grief blatantly as it would be for us to wish to be alone with our grief. She is just as right as we are. Saturn, who are his children, repeats himself in natural history through all the classes of animals provided with teeth, or other means of eating, just the same as the mother gives her blood and her life for the young brood. And when we see self-control in those who mourn we cannot tell whether their self-control covers deep feeling or indifference.

*August 9, 1916*

The whole world is making up its accounts for two years of war. If they did so honestly, not one could show a profit.

So every nation, every statesman, every correspondent, and every expert put the items it pleases them to see into their accounts and leave out all the unpleasant ones.

As I should not think of taking part in this swindle, I would be all the more justified in balancing my own account of the War.

But I would enter items that no one would understand or that no one would, in any case, like to see expressed. The item of self-deception seems to be so gigantic with all nations that it should take the chief place in the reckoning. But no one believes in it, and none of them enter it in their books. The item of hypocrisy and lies is also to be found everywhere, though it may differ among various nations, which is not the case with self-deception; they are all equally good at the latter. The individual is less deceived with regard to himself; he knows the measure of his strength and has rather too little than too much self-confidence. If he boasts about his prowess it is rather the pleasure he takes in his deeds than deception or lying. But with peoples it is deception and lies.

States are like gamblers; they lie themselves into believing that they have any amount in their pockets, and when a number turns up for them they think that they have won. Is it possible that any people can show, or will ever be able to show, a gain, whether it be in land, subjects, war indemnity, trade advantages, alliances, or whatever it may be, that will compensate for the losses that every nation has suffered through the time the game has lasted?

And even if it were possible what would be the value of such a gain for all peoples in proportion to the greatness of the stakes?

If one considers national strength as capital our balance is without doubt more favourable in this respect than that of any other people. This capital has been used to put up in front of any indifferent track on the map, with outstretched arms and straddled legs, crying "Halt!" to the enemy. As long as the track did not lead into the Black, White, and Red one was satisfied. This frontier guard idea, brought into war,

will be our undoing. Falkenhayn is said to have admitted that a "strategic war" could have been waged. But then we should "have had to give up Provinces." I recall, so that I may not be accused of being wise after the event, that the taking of the Russian fortresses was a matter of indifference to me, so long as a strategic threat to Petersburg or a destruction of the Russian Army did not accompany or follow it.

If the large item of conquered territory which the Germans have entered (how can one call it a win when it is still in play?), seems to imply very little advantage in the sense of a decision, the balance as a whole is still worse. I say this only with regard to the enormous strength there was in the people, which we must all feel and admire. Instead of writing it down as a credit we should have brought its full force into play. "One can never be too strong for the battle," said Moltke; we have run counter to this simple truth in every possible manner.

My own war accounts for two years do not exactly show a surplus of great value for my life. The results are not great and in many respects disappointing. I have not gained many persons who stood superior to events; I have not even seen many. To have met R.-T. is a gain; so it is to admire Waldorf. Many fine men pass by, and are swallowed up in the dust of the road before you can get a proper look at them.

What I have done myself is certainly of small account in relation to the whole. But it is no exaggeration—if I may repeat myself—to say that I have not been so stupid as I should have been. So I went to Army Headquarters in Thielt last Monday and told the Chief of Staff that I volunteered for the Front and not for the Lines of Communication. And though my unit belongs nominally to the Army of Operations, what we are being asked to do now is only L. of C. work. He agreed with me. And although it may seem ungrateful to leave this squadron, with which I shared the brave days of advance and battle in the beginning, yet I would do it if I could not get hold of something better, so long as it is



closer to the War. I don't know what the General has in mind for me. "I can get you a battalion at once," he said.

If it comes off people will think that I am mad. For it means exchanging independence for subordination, cavalry for infantry, parks for dug-outs, cleanliness for lice, quiet days for unquiet nights, far-away gunfire for imminent shellfire: but you will understand. And even if you do not understand—that cannot alter matters this time!

WEST FLANDERS, *August 14, 1916*

I heard to-day that Seeckt had recommended me for a job as A.D.C. in the Southern Army. The decision lies with Corps Headquarters and they have not decided yet.

*August 14, 1916, Evening*

The decision has come through. I am transferred to the Archduke Charles's Army Group, Southern Army.

*August 15, 1916*

The parting with my squadron was very painful. They were splendid fellows; they had tears in their eyes. I had to make it short—for their sake as well as mine.

I wrote the following poem a few days ago—inspired by the Battle of the Somme:

Aus vielen hundert Schlachten  
hebt sich die letzte Schlacht.  
Aus Monden die wir wachten  
steht auf die letzte Nacht.

Kein Ehr' ist mehr, kein Schande.  
Hier sind wir ganz allein,  
Verlassne und Verbannte:  
Der Feind trommelt uns ein.

Friert euch?—Ihr blickt in Schauern  
seltsam an euch herab—?  
In ungeheuren Mauern  
steigt rings empor das Grab.

In ungeheuren Feiern  
trinkt uns hinweg der Tod.  
In ungeheuren Schleiern  
stampft uns der Krieg in Kot.

Will's Glück, so sterb' ich heute,  
will's anders, lieg' ich krumm  
—wie lang—im Grabgeläute.  
Und dann wird alles stumm.

Und wär' es dass von allen  
einen es von sich spie:  
Hier ist ja doch gefallen  
die ganze Kompanie.

Soldatenlos, o schönes,  
zu sterben für den Sieg—  
Mein Freund, mein Freund, ich höhn' es,  
wie ich hier vor dir lieg'.

In ungeheuren Feiern  
trinkt uns hinab der Tod.  
In ungeheuren Schleiern  
stampft uns der Krieg in Kot.

## WITH A FIGHTING DIVISION

CHODOROW (GALICIA), *August 22, 1916*

As soon as I entered "black and yellow" area<sup>1</sup> the duration of my journey passed beyond the realms of calculation. I arrived here yesterday evening after changing trains times without number. The G.H.Q. of the Archduke Charles's Army is quartered pell-mell in the big local sugar-factory, an enormous Austrian Staff with indefinite functions and the German Operations Department. What used to be the offices of the management in peace-time are now turned to similar uses in war; the workmen's dwellings have become quarters for the rank and file and personnel, and the officials' houses officers' billets. Everything is very, very simple, but the straw mattress on which I threw myself last night was a pleasant change after the railway carriages of the last few days and my bed in the cupboard of the château in Flanders.

I saw General von Seeckt, and spoke to him for a moment just before he jumped into his car to tear off to the Front. I am to have charge of "Q" duties in one of the new divisions with big numbers which are in process of formation.

BEDNAROW, *August 24, 1916*

Here is my provisional destination. I arrived in this little mud village two days ago in a Staff car. It was crawling with troops of all descriptions, troops going up, troops coming back, troops looking for billets, Austrians, Germans, refugees, and natives. I asked for the headquarters of the division with the big number, but there was no information to be had; the division did not appear to exist. Eventually I spied, quite by chance, on the wall of a little house opposite the school (if you can call it a school) a little cardboard placard with the number for which I was looking and the proud inscription "STAFF." I went in. A Signals N.C.O. was busy laying telephone lines, and there was a telephone on the table in one of

<sup>1</sup> Area occupied and administered by the Austro-Hungarian Army. Black and yellow were the colours of the Habsburg Monarchy.

the rooms. A General Staff officer and a young officer of *Jäger* were the only people in the room who were likely to be of any interest to me. It was right. This was so far all that there was of the division; I was the third member.

I inquired about the troops. "Troops?" said the General Staff officer, "there aren't any troops. We'll see about them to-night." There was nothing to be done at the moment. I sought out my horses, which had arrived in the meantime, and found a billet in one of the huts, which was not so easy in view of the way the place was crowded. There are horses and transport columns bivouacked all round. My beasts stand in a low sort of stable where they bump their heads against the roof. I sleep with the G.S.O. in one of the empty rooms of the school. It is reported that the Staff of the Division is on the way from Posen; the troops are not so easily come by. At night, when the telephone lines get a little rest from their day's work, Captain Geyer gets through to General Headquarters in Pless. He is one of the best met at this job in the whole War—naturally a Württemberger I had almost said. I take the second receiver. Eventually at the other end of the line we hear the voice of the man whom the G.S.O. has asked for. He (the G.S.O.), who is usually employed at G.H.Q. and has only been exiled here for this job, asks calmly, "Well, what about troops? What about guns?" "Guns? Nothing doing. I don't know."

GEYER: "Well, what about infantry?"

*Voice down the telephone:* "Infantry? There must be a Regiment No. 237 or so somewhere in your neighbourhood. Hang on to that."

I (*quietly to GEYER*): "No. 237? I know them; they're not so bad." (It was one of my old divisions which had been taken away to make up another formation.)

GEYER: "All right; we take No. 237. What about guns and transport?"

*Voice down the telephone:* "You can't have any transport under any circumstances."

GEYER: "Yes, but we shall want some transport. After all,

we must have something to carry our ammunition and our rations, and our fodder, and our equipment."

*Voice down the telephone:* "Well, you see about that. I tell you, you can't have any transport."

GEYER: "What about guns?"

*Voice down the telephone:* "Ring up again to-morrow."

When this conversation came to an end I was rather depressed. The G.S.O. did not take it so seriously. "I expect they will send us guns," he said, "but it doesn't look very hopeful about transport."

This business began to interest me; I came to the conclusion that it was rather smart. In order to avoid all unnecessary movement and bother an attempt was being made here to form new divisions, so to speak, out of nothing, right under the eyes of the enemy, and push them up to replace the Austrian troops which could no longer be relied on either here or anywhere else. The Russians are in front of Stanislaw, about ten miles to the south-east, in the valley of the Bystritza, and have been quiet last night and this morning. Within this narrow space there are two little rivers in deep valleys, with steep roads down to them and up again, which divide us from the enemy. All the same we are so close that we have constantly to be ready to move. Rest is out of the question. All day and all night long there is a constant succession of telephone calls, officers, troops, cars, cows, and "Panics"<sup>1</sup> ringing, shouting, questioning, hooting, bellowing, and giving orders. You cannot have the faintest conception of what it is all like.

SOUTH GALICIA, *August 25, 1916*

Last night we talked on the telephone to General Headquarters about artillery. After much question and answer Geyer was promised that he should be sent some newly formed regiments with high numbers. "Of course, they won't be able to shoot," said Geyer. As for transport, we are still

<sup>1</sup> *Pan*, Vocative *Panie*, is Polish for *Monsieur*. The Polish country-folk were known to the German army as *Panies*.



in the air. As I have been allotted the task of organizing reinforcements, including men, horses, and wagons, I am particularly interested in transport. I do not yet see how that sort of thing can be created out of nothing. The infantry regiment (mentioned as in our neighbourhood) has been successfully "snared"—one cannot describe it otherwise—and is at our disposal. Of course, it has no transport.

The days pass hurriedly, full of restless scenes. Troops are continually turning up which were presumably destined for us beforehand, and so had no need to form the subject of nightly telephone talks with G.H.Q. Countless demands and indents from all sorts of troops come in. The work is restless and unsystematic; everything seems equally important, because the least important costs as much trouble and labour as the most important.

Meanwhile the Staff has also arrived, mostly very youthful, with the possible exception of the G.O.C. Division, who seems old in comparison with the wiry figure of my old General. He is a straightforward, friendly, simple man, of undoubted courage, who has fought in the Carpathians before, and is entirely satisfied with these extremely primitive conditions and quarters. The man in the Divisional Staff who interests me most is the Intendant, who looks after the War chest, for a sinister plan is being hatched with regard to transport. . . .

*August 28, 1916*

Everything is still in confusion, like an ant-heap upset by the heel of a boot. You must understand that the whole division is being formed more or less in bivouac conditions. Fresh troops are arriving all the time, and there is very little room. Everywhere we are sandwiched between the Austrians, who, having been here longest, have got the best billets, the best bivouac sites, and naturally all the stables. On the other hand, one could not risk not sending here at once all the rifles available.

At night thousands of horses stand about, miserably picketed. Thousands more of men lie close pressed together

under the wagons in a gigantic irregular bivouac, in cart-sheds, in tents, and in the houses, the thatched roofs of which are cut into the shape of steps and reach right down to the ground. In the street, which revives a bit in the later hours of the day and during the night, when the great motor-lorries do not rumble so frequently over its battered body, the refugees pass by in high-piled wagons, hauled by cows or little horses. Calves and foals run alongside; the women, young and old, push behind, the children squat on top among the bundles, while the old men trail along by themselves without opening their mouths or raising their eyes, often quite separated from the wagons and people to whom they belong.

The village folk are not beautiful, much nearer to the earth than we, entirely guileless, submissive by nature, not by their own volition. They are merry when they are by themselves, and charming with their children, to whom they nod while they are working, or throw them a corn-cob or two, never without laughing. The elder among them are soon used up, as if they were drained by the hot earth, which takes them to itself again after it has nurtured them.

The country is all split up by countless brooks and little rivers. As there is very little woodland the streams are alternately full of yellow water up to the edges of their channels or quite dry. Wells do not exist, only water-holes.

Seeckt is a person of importance, even to look at. He sticks his nose into the breeze in an airy sort of way, is amiable, but very strict.

The difficulties here are positively distracting.

*September 1, 1916*

The situation has its points. The division has so far not been attacked, but all the neighbouring divisions have been, and very dangerously. I have not a moment to spare, and I am always flitting about. In our division so far only the infantry is ready for action, and to some extent the artillery. The Austrians, who are attached to us in front of Halicz, are not holding their ground. Give your imagination reins and picture

everything to yourself in the greatest possible confusion ; then perhaps you will get somewhere near it. No time for more ; I must be off.

*September 5, 1916*

There is a fierce battle raging to the east of Halicz. The heights on both sides of the Dniester Valley are held by our divisions, which have been put in like stitches to hold the Austrians together. But what is the good of strong stitches when the cloth which they are to hold is rotten? The "ratting" and surrendering are indescribable. Then, of course, the parks and ammunition columns streaming to the rear make a very disturbing impression on our steady and reliable German troops as they go forward. By the time they get into action they have passed by so many hopeless and helpless ones that their most valuable quality, spontaneity, has disappeared. Every now and again the Russians shell the town. It is absolutely made for defence, but what is the good when the enemy is better than the defender? What is happening here cannot be helped. It is impossible to tell whether the whole situation is immensely complicated or immensely simple. One thing is certain, there is no holding out here for long. The only question is how far we can slow down the enemy's advance.

Halicz gives an impression of utter desolation. It has long been evacuated by its inhabitants ; it is abandoned by the Austrians, exposed by the troops which were posted in front of it, and the bridge over the Dniester is prepared for demolition. A few wretched Jews' dens on the hillside, a few huts with poor Galicians, who are more Russian than Austrian, are the only signs of life. Everything else is more or less untouched, but dead and deserted.

*To . . .*

IN FRONT OF HALICZ, *September 6, 1916*

I am on night duty, and am all alone with the telephone and lots of flies, possibly a few fleas as well. After the day's fighting, in which every man we had was used, with the exception of

two pioneer companies and a handful of Uhlans, there is a pause in the battle. It is a tragedy that, although all our troops made good the failure of the Austrians when once they got into action, the whole line has still got to be withdrawn on account of the danger to the Magsa heights. Magsa and Mogila are the dominating positions in the foothills to the east of the Dniester: we hold them both. Magsa commands the big bridge over the Dniester, but we cannot hold it sufficiently strongly for want of men. The blanket is altogether too short; if you pull it over your legs in one place you get cold in another.

1 a.m.

The orders are not all through yet, although five hours have passed since the few words above were written. I am having the cook waked to get me something to eat. I hope he has got something.

The whole Southern Army is retiring under cover of night. Halicz is being more or less abandoned. It is hard for us, for, although our losses run into thousands, we have held our ground everywhere.

3 a.m.

Just a word between telephone conversations. We are already abandoning position. The Staff is staying till daybreak in order to maintain liaison.

EAST BANK OF THE DNIESTER, *September 6, 1916*

The G.S.O. and I have worked all night. Not until six o'clock did the wires begin to slacken. I have just had an hour's sleep, and close my letter now. Perhaps the field-post will get it over the Dniester before the bridge goes up. Losses very heavy and reserves very scarce; I suppose that is the explanation.

*September 8, 1916*

One steals one's sleep by half-hours. So it goes on, day in and day out. We just got out of Halicz in time the day before

yesterday. The Russian infantry was already busy taking pot-shots at our car as we drove along this bank of the river. The last two days seem like weeks to me. Yesterday there was the devil of a battle by Bolczowsce, for which our division came in. Things were very hot, even on our position; they probably guessed that it was a Staff H.Q. We are fighting a very difficult rearguard action. Yesterday the front held, but for how long? The odds are too immense and too perceptible. Hindenburg has issued orders that we are to hold on to the last man.

*September 8, 1916. Later*

In their attack on Bolczowsce the Russians were beaten back by us and by our neighbour divisions with the loss of thousands. I sat on a hill and could follow the whole battle. Every now and then an errand took me to the fighting troops, who were splendid. Bolczowsce was ringed round with shell-fire for hours, but was held, nevertheless. Our artillery caught the Russians as they charged our positions from the farther heights over a big distance with great pluck. Very few of them reached us, quite exhausted, and were taken prisoners. The valleys and the deep, bare hollows of this bit of country bellow strangely and curiously as the passing shells spin their net over them. They roar like tigers.

*GALICIA, September 10, 1916*

Since the battle of Bolczowsce the Russians have been quiet. They lost a nasty lot of blood there—a thing which has not happened to them for some time. This land does not only hold Russians and lice. Flies and fleas also wage war. Of the flies one really cannot speak or they fly into one's mouth. Fortunately the nights are cold, which makes them settle on the warm, brick stove which fills the middle of the house, but by day they are masters of the situation. They are always on the same spot—on hand, or head, or ear, or wrist. If one moves they fly a hand's breadth into the air and then settle again. They plague us non-natives more than the Russian



shells. It is no good chasing them. Fly-papers are black in five minutes, and there is nothing to be done. The fleas are a bit more cheerful. After some experience I have come to the conclusion that it is, for the present, quite impossible to rid one's shirt of them entirely. By the time one sleeve is clear some little hopper has found time to make his way to the other one. Every respectable person has at least six in his shirt, and you can count on the same scale for other articles of clothing. You can just do with that number. They are as big as young cockchafers. As they bite you all over there is no sense in scratching yourself on any particular spot. I get a bag of about twelve every morning; the big captain always beats me, and puts me to shame with the size of his bag, but then he gets up half an hour later.

KOROSTOWICE, *September 10, 1916*

The irregularity of a Galician village is almost inconceivable. The village street is not laid out; it is just dumped down. The little houses stand sometimes high up, sometimes low down among the limestone hills, surrounded by bushes, woods, filth, and wisps of straw. Not a single house in this place has any sort of sanitary convenience. The sun shines and the rain washes—that is the sanitation of Korostowice. The people are very small, and the doors consequently too low for such as we. Each of the rooms, in which we have to carry our heads bent, has a good set of wood fittings of its own; the benches, skirting-boards, etc., are all part of the structure. Bedposts and heads of the short bedsteads have the same simple carving as the benches and the chairs. The houses, the people, and the animals all match one another. It would be quite perfect if terrible pictures of saints with cheap gold paper and bad glass were not hung round the walls. The saints look as if they had got the largest collection of fleas of anybody in the room. The people are short, undersized, and thick-legged. One would not call them badly built, only very ignoble according to our ideas. Fortunately they do not run about with nothing on, as Indians or niggers with better physique can

afford to do, but have invented for themselves a suitable rough costume in heavy wool with bright colours.

The sun blazes fiercely by day on the bare hills, which are irregularly cultivated. The nights are so cold that the puddles freeze.

The G.O.C. division is a man of distinction who enjoys witty conversation, likes telling a good story, and has so good a memory for them that one is inclined to suspect that his own actual experiences have not been very great. At all events he is touchingly human, reasonable, and brave, as we now know. He is always unassuming, even where he is entitled not to be, and cares nothing for honours and decorations. He likes good cigars, but does not smoke them often, partly from economy and partly from Prussian meanness. It is an act of self-control for him to smoke no good cigars, although he is passionately fond of them.

GALICIA, *September 14, 1916*

Since the battle of Halicz-Bolczowsce-Herbutow the fighting has died down. The Russians are digging trenches hard, presumably for the winter. They are in the same position as we, with large numbers of men without quarters in a neighbourhood notorious for snow-drifts, biting blizzards, and bitter cold. The villages, which are poor enough to start with and incapable of accommodating large numbers of men in their little scattered peasants' huts, were burnt down and destroyed during the enemy's retreat last year. The tracks, which are hampered by marshes on the low ground, lead so steeply over the hills that they are already almost impassable for our horses and wagons. In winter even the native Polish forces, which at present transport our ammunition and rations in light country carts, will not be able to get over them. The regulation ration-wagons and other regimental transport which we brought from the Western Front and from home have, for the most part, been abandoned or handed over, if they haven't actually been left stuck in the marshes. Owing to the absence of good metalled roads the lorries of the motor transport

columns are only a very poor substitute for the railway, the most important section of which (towards Stanislaw) has become unusable by either side. We can't get them near enough. On the main roads the dust now lies ankle deep, and soon the mud will lie deeper still.

The nights have become icy cold, the flies are getting tired and the fleas quieter. The few bits of woodland on the hills have got to be preserved as cover from view and fire, so that we cannot set up saw-mills and build huts. This is naturally the first idea which would occur to a German, although timber huts and houses are strikingly inadequate to the bitterness of the climate. Apparently the only shelter available against the cold winds, which are already cutting over the hills like a knife, will be the mud huts of the natives, unless we build deep dug-outs.

The mud huts have very thick walls. The mud is poured in wet between hurdles, and these are then plastered again within and without with more mud. The enormous thatched roof rests right on top of the walls of the low, square living-room, its thick layers cut into the shape of steps, and its ridge held fast by pairs of poles morticed into one another and laid on the thatch at intervals of a few feet. The space in the roof is not used for living purposes. Every house has a sort of wind-shelter before its door, either made of wood or clay. Besides these hurdles are put up on the windward side and bound together with weeds and bushes so as to make a sort of enclosed yard. Houses like this can be built in a few days, but they would have had to be built in the spring in order to be dry by now. Moreover, it is all very well to talk; the responsible authorities are not to be got away from Western ideas of hut building until they freeze themselves.

The army which had been formed here has now been completely split up into separate shreds and used to patch the endless front. Most of the Austrian combinations have been taken out. We now hold the line Narajowka-Gnila Lipa almost continually from north to south. If Hindenburg doesn't have a brain-wave we shall gradually come to the

conclusion that we are not going to be able to win this War. We shall probably be able to go on holding off the enemy for a long time, but instead of beating him we shall come to be satisfied (as with the fleas) if he doesn't beat us. The odds against us are too immense.

GALICIA, *September 20, 1916*

A Galician peasant's hut is worth describing. As everybody has the same requirements they are invariably the same in appearance, which gives them a style of their own. Everything is exactly symmetrical, and the front walls always divided on the same simple pattern by a door in the middle and one window on either side of it, which makes a pleasant impression. However, living conditions are not so comfortable for people with Western ideas. A warm, sour odour of milk, mingled with another odour of half-digested cattle food, hangs about the house, and is continually renewed in a mysterious way so that it is not even to be got rid of by opening wide the broad, low casement. Almost the whole of one of the walls of the living-room is taken up by an enormous stove, which also belongs to the kitchen, whence it is fired. On it sit the flies in black, shimmering ranks, glittering in stars and clusters and rows, and half asleep. That does not prevent others from besieging one's hands and face and swarming and nibbling and tickling all over them. The native's sense of smell and feeling is several degrees lower than our own, and no Galician would trouble to raise a finger were ever so many flies running over him.

The yards, by which I mean the spaces beside or in front of the houses, are at present most magnificent to see. There sit the women, gay and brilliant to behold, all in variegated costumes of red, yellow, and violet, all with white or coloured head-cloths, peeling the ripe sun-coloured corn cobs of their dry and rustling leaves. They pile them up on a cloth, gossiping busily all the time. Others pluck hemp with rough combs, beating it rather than pulling it. The hemp is drawn with the left hand through the blunt wooden teeth of the comb, which



is continually raised and brought down again with the right. Others again are picking over broad-beans, which they let roll over enormous sheets.

The women are strongly and broadly built; only the statelier among them are tall, and they are not many. These massive figures are splendid to look at in this landscape. When the girls go down to the river to wash out the linen which they have been scrubbing in the house, and then come up the hill again, carrying the heavy, dripping rolls over a pole on their shoulders, bending under their load and taking long and slow strides, they make a picture which, in its sublime simplicity and placidity, is quite un-European.

The autumn days pass over this land, one more beautiful than the other. The nights are sharp and clear, the early mornings filled with a calm, mysterious mist, above which the high-lying villages and still higher churches glimmer in the sun. The middle of the day is hot, almost torrid.

The Austrians do not like this country. I suppose it has brought them too much illusion and deception, but it is mainly their own fault. They say that they have never got a penny out of Galicia, but they do nothing to get one. Piles of straw lie about waste and ungleaned in the fields; millions of potatoes rot and are not harvested because the land is uncultivated when it might be cultivated. The marshes are not drained. Where the roads ought to be improved and repaired one occasionally sees a few piles of stones by the way, but they have been there for years. The really big farms, which dominate the land by their size, belong to Poles, and are for the most part abandoned or insufficiently tended and exploited. Little or nothing is done for the refugees in the war-zone. Previously the Austrian transport columns used to help them on their way to the rear, but now herds of the homeless creatures squat immediately behind the battle-zone, right in the middle of the German columns which are already short enough of quarters in the miserable villages. They lie in hundreds in the long barns of the farms with their cows and women and children, the pregnant mare beside the pregnant



woman; every one of them in their best clothes, with all their goods and chattels stowed in sacks, and where they settle they are not to be got rid of.

This land, which the Austrians surrender as easily as they do themselves, is being defended by Germans and Turks against the Russians to whom it belongs, fundamentally on account of its traditions and superficially as well on account of their bribery and propaganda.

GALICIA, *End of September, 1916*

The transport, which we have been short of all the time, is now at last up to strength.

When the Divisional Paymaster turned up with the rest of the staff in Bednarow I drank with him during the first few days for all I was worth. This proved to be a highly successful method of approach. In other words, he got thoroughly drunk and I kept my head. In these conditions I was able to obtain from him all manner of things. That is where the transport came in. In love with this life, and also a little with me, he suggested a second bottle. From that moment he was mine.

You must know that it was forbidden to buy locally any horses fit for military service; this was by agreement with the Austrians. In any case, the country people would sell us nothing at all; but they would sell to the Galician Jews, or at least the Jews alone were able to persuade them to sell. So I bought for the division lots of the little light country carts, drawn by pairs of little light horses, which were known by us as "Panie wagons," as transport and horses for our columns. We required many hundreds of them. We didn't ask for permission. But as our men, who were used to bigger horses, did not understand them, and the horses, who were used to other drivers, would not work for our men, the "Panies" remained on the driver's seat; it was only in these conditions (with few exceptions) that I was able to get the team. A German transport man was stuck on the bit of wood which served as seat beside the Galician driver in his national costume.

By the help of these outlandish teams, which had the advantage of being far more suitable for the Galician roads and tracks than any of the heavier German strains, we provided the troops of our division with transport.

But . . . . They had to be paid for . . . !

To cut a long story short, the Paymaster was a very good sort, with whom it was a pleasure to drink. If he made a promise overnight he kept it in the morning, whether it was because he was not yet sober or because he immediately got drunk again out of horror at his own wickedness.

EASTERN GALICIA, *October 5, 1916*

The face of war is more closely masked here than on any other front. Our positions are constantly being changed; refugees unexpectedly appear and disappear, nobody knows where from or where to; troops are constantly being borrowed, to be thrown in suddenly at a weak spot in the front; the changes in command, with their comings and goings, are past all understanding; we are in the dark as to whether we are fighting among allies or neutrals. All this makes one uneasy and suspicious. It all looks like a beginning without any meaning, like an evil dream in which we move without being able to exert our own wills. Why should refugees suddenly appear when the front has been practically stationary for four weeks? Why should the Germans be asked to provide for them? Why are we building roads and causeways through the marshes? Why is Seeckt and the whole German Staff going off with the Archduke Charles to Transylvania? Why are we for half a day an independent division and then placed for two days under the command of one General, and on the third day under the command of another? Even the G.S.O.'s of divisions don't know why. Every moment brings fresh surprises into view which appear to be without meaning and without advantage for anybody. So for the ordinary mortal it is difficult to find any explanation of the masked face of events.

Enormous new artillery formations are being prepared,

here, there, and everywhere. Where they come from is a mystery, and, to some extent, suspicious.

It may be that one used to take all this much more as a matter of course, but I do not consider that one has any right to do so any longer. Take, for example, such victories as that of the War Loan. It does not seem to occur to anybody to consider the perfectly amazing subscription of milliards to a national loan as a sign of distress, and anything but a victory. If at the present moment in England Treasury Bonds are offered at 6 per cent., I cannot understand how the newspapers dare to make capital for us out of the fact.

This year will certainly remain in my memory as a year of war; but I believe that its main significance for the future, and especially for our future, will be that it has brought the realization of the power of the British Empire, just like that of the Roman Empire, which used to include the whole world. Even if the individual nations do not exactly render tribute, as they used to to Rome, at least they render service. They provide their quota of soldiers, or ammunition, or ships, or at least lies. Everything for money, but with complete obedience. No imperial sway need go further than that of Great Britain. In contrast to the Old Roman and German Empires, in contrast to the Napoleonic conception, it is based on facts, not on an idea. It is so simple that it must be quite incomprehensible to us Germans. If I attest its existence, will any German believe me? It is questionable whether this power will last for long, but I believe that it will decide our fate.

A world-empire will produce no civilization, but perhaps civilizations will be born apart from it, since it will itself be barren in that sense. Maybe the German civilization will be one of them. I imagine it, of course, simply as the result of the cult of our own existence, our own needs—not based on foreign markets, not to be valued by any ordinary standard, perhaps destined to be despised by the rest of the world, but yet just as wonderful as a God's first attempt at creation, when he takes the lump of clay into his hand and seeks out of his own life to breathe life into it.

*October 20, 1916*

It is abundantly dismal and unpleasant in this deserted convent of Bursztyn. The nuns are packed into one wing, and the rooms which they have given up have a musty appearance. It is true that there are enormous stoves, but there is no wood or coal to heat them. The long corridors are penetrated with damp and evil odours which belong to the drains, only there are no such things. The mud is like an open bog on all roads and paths and even in the courtyard, right up to the door. Now we understand why the Galician women as well as the men wear high, shapeless top-boots on their thick legs.

Unceasing rain for three days and three nights has sufficed to fill the impenetrable clay beds of the little rivers to overflowing, and the low-lying marshland has become flooded at once. The Narajowka used to be no obstacle, but after three days' rain it is impassable.

The weather keeps both the Russians and ourselves suppressed. Friend and foe are working desperately at their trenches, but they are not to be saved from swamping. The guns are quiet because no ammunition can reach them through this mud. The horses come to a standstill even before empty wagons, and collapse irrevocably before loaded ones. Men are drafted to mend the roads, but they stand helpless before the stream of mud. Troops marching in close formation are an impossibility anywhere.

This, then, is the prelude to winter. Anyone who comes through it here will be frozen and blasted by spring. But war is like the nations: out of the lapse of the unsuffering time it always wins fresh breath for the next year.

*To . . .*

*EAST GALICIA, October 29, 1916*

Since you ask about it, just imagine to yourself about 30,000 men with all their requirements for war. The Paymaster's department provides for their bodily needs; their war requirements are my business. Indents come in for rifles, field-glasses, tools, horses, wagons, men, printed instructions,

snow-spectacles, horse-shoes, machine-guns, guns, anything in fact that the army needs, and each of these requirements has to be obtained from somewhere else, waited for, now hurried up, now sent back again, until at last it reaches the troops in some given spot. Now imagine to yourself that this machine has slowly been put into motion. All of a sudden you are told that the wheels have got to run backwards, or that everything has got to stop and be set working again in another direction, that the drafts have not got to be started on their way in vain from all parts of Germany, that the guns have no longer got to roll up here where they are no longer wanted, but somewhere quite different, which hasn't yet been decided upon; yet in spite of all this everything has got to reach its appointed unit.

*November 2, 1916*

The division is being moved to the Western Front. It is an enormous load to move. It's my business to keep it going, and to push on from behind. Nothing must be left behind. Not a wagon, not a horse, not a man may one leave to one's successors. However, to get the great load away bit by bit is only possible provided the big new load which is coming to take our place arrives punctually and without hitch.

I am taking our transport with us; I refuse to leave them behind unless I get definite orders (and there aren't any); so the "Panie" drivers on their seats have got to come too. Transport is always a useful thing. Perhaps I shall be allowed to keep it; then, when we get to the Western Front, where transport will be waiting for us, we shall be doubly efficient.

Every now and then I strike a battery, a transport column, a squadron, or a hospital off my list. That means that the relief from the new division has arrived and taken over its position, thus setting the unit free. We have only a few small railway stations at our disposal, both for arrivals and departures, and some of them are several days' march away. The movements go on day and night, but even so it is very slow work.

All my messmates are already gone. I have no one, not



even subordinates, to help me. I have been left behind and have to be patient; moreover, it behoves me to be very wide-awake, since the newcomers immediately regard everything which they find as their own property. They want to stick to wagons, horses, machine-guns, and here and there a man, for some duty or another. They even try to steal whole companies. So I arm myself partly with amiability and partly with guile, but invariably with refusals.

*To . . .*

A LITTLE CHÂTEAU ON THE MEUSE, *November 12, 1916*

Somewhere the other side of Sedan I breakfasted in a very French-looking landscape off the drumstick of a Galician goose and a slice of French ham. The night's journey was a good one. I woke up at the right time, apparently not very far away from you, and found myself in good form, since I was hungry. You kept me company in my thoughts as I ate my goose and ham, and it struck me as rather mean that you should have nothing while I was enjoying my breakfast. I thanked you for your company and for the meal, and then got out at —, whence the familiar little Galician cart brought me here in a quarter of an hour along a smooth high road, an incredible sight after the streaks of mud in Galicia. This is a little château which looks out over the valley of the Meuse, where the river shows indistinctly through the mist. The landscape is much smaller than in Galicia. Homesteads, the railway, the river with its windings, the hills with their cultivation, the broad strips of the road from place to place, all seem to pull it more together.

The quarters are so so, the château not up to much. Bad porcelain and second-rate, old-fashioned chests and furniture fill the passages and rooms to repletion; some collector with little knowledge has surrounded himself with old things because "old" and "good" seemed to him to mean the same.

No news about our destination. It is to be hoped that we are not going to be used up on the Somme or at Verdun like any old rubbish; the regiments are too good for that.

To . . .

November 30, 1916

This was the only day which I could manage to scrape in the now familiar business of moving the division, so I decided not to wait for the things which you had promised me for our dead friend, but I thought of you by his graveside and took you with me. So he will not have missed your mundane offerings—if, indeed, he misses anything.

It will never occur to anybody who has been there to take him away from the place where he lies. The village cemetery at Leffincourt is better than the family vault at F. Not much room for the dead, but it will probably never be enlarged. Down the middle runs a double row of tall, sombre pine-trees; the village is old, but not many people seem to die there. The graves are quite old; I only saw a single new cross, but three big airmen's crosses, made out of crossed propellers, mark three new graves, in one of which lies our friend.

The churchyard lies somewhat higher than the village, but not near the church. Round about lies the fallow land of the Champagne. It was cold, and the whole neighbourhood is bare. The grave is well tended and nicely planted with flowers. At the head a few words have been traced out in blue and white pebbles on the dark earth; quite simple and artless; our friend would have smiled over them, and yet let them stand because they were well meant.

I wrote a few lines and then mounted my horse again, knowing that he would accompany me for many, many miles.

THE SOMME FRONT, *December 2, 1916*

For all we know it may be any one person's destiny to complete the life of another by giving him a single day's happiness.

For the time being I am sitting in a nasty little town, about which I have a vague recollection that it was once famous, waiting for various parts of our unit which are on the way. Behind me burns the celebrated French open fire, which is

entirely useless to overcome the effects of the exceedingly un-French frost which at present reigns.

This town, like everything else here, appears to have no justification. According to the number of inhabitants marked on the French map half the houses must be empty or inhabited by hermits, even in peace-time. The neighbourhood is bare and uninviting; wave after wave of desolate fallow, a regular battlefield. Yesterday I came through Guise. I had imagined to myself something great, but there was nothing but a great long piece of castle wall and half a tower up the hill, and the town down below on the Oise is disappointingly commonplace for its age and the name it bears.

In front of me lies a fat packet of papers about experiences in the Somme battle, from which it appears that there are lots of experiences to be had, but not many remedies against the unpleasant ones.

ON THE SOMME, *December 26, 1916*

The battle here is the epitome of everything which the War represents to-day; that is to say, constantly repeated destruction, constant putting forth of effort, development of power and means, employment of masses of men and material, constant physical and mental strain.

For me, too, this is the greatest effort of the War. It takes hours to cover even a portion of our position at night. One wades waist deep through shell-holes filled with mud; one crawls through the passages of dug-outs, cut thirty feet deep in the rock, under fallen trees, over plank bridges of the most damnable slipperiness, often in sight of the enemy, and every now and then caught in a burst of shell-fire or held up by a barrage.

The transport has to plough its way with horses and wagons through the mud at night in order to take the troops their rations, the guns their ammunition. Their way is marked by dead horses; many of them fall without being hit, and the mud closes over them. But ammunition, rations, trenching material, and all the rest has to be got up; there's no rest at

night. In the morning we crawl home, plastered with mud, horse and rider stiff with cold, our heads sunk on our chests, dead tired and worn out. Every few yards along the roads, which are now worn deep below their edges, are posted Russian prisoners, who are supposed to shovel the mud aside. Day after day they stand helpless, for, however much they shovel, the mud bath never grows less.

*December 28, 1916*

I have certainly acquired a bad opinion of the human race after seeing the calamities and abuses into which it has allowed itself to be involved during these last years, but I must admit I have recently been seized with an extraordinary pity for it. These poor blind victims! These fools, without even simplicity in their folly! Every now and then I find myself driven to brood apart over these things, like Moses on the mountain-top. The terrible thing about it is that one should be forced into this sort of train of thought.

*January 8, 1917*

The country in front of St-Pierre-Vaast Wood is a place of horror. I was out there one of the last nights. For days and weeks the earth there has been churned up again and again to its very depths. Dead men and animals, arms and equipment, are tossed about in the mud and slime, splashed up on high, pounded down into the earth again, again thrown up and torn into pieces until they are things without form or shape. Whole batteries of guns with their crews are inextricably kneaded together in the crucible of their gigantic foundry.

Through all this we went together, the G.S.O. and I. Our guides lost their way, although I do not suppose they had been picked for their stupidity. The few forward posts in the outlying shell-holes did not notice us; there was no barbed wire to separate friend from foe. All of a sudden we were in No Man's Land, and quite close to our right English voices reached us out of a shell-hole. Fortunately the enemy's flares showed us our way.

The weather was frightful. Heavy falls of snow and rain followed one another in turn without interruption. The mud came over our knees, oozing thick and brown through our stout waterproof overalls. We reeked of carrion and mud. So we waded about in weird tracks as the crumbling shell-holes forced us to. I collapsed in the mud and had to call for help. They hauled me with sticks out of a sort of abyss which seemed to be moving underneath me. We fell again and again. After five hours of uninterrupted effort we certainly did not cover more than 2,000 yards, which is the length of our so-called front. We know now that there is nothing out in front; that the "blue" line which marked the position on the maps which we took over from the outgoing troops is mere nonsense. There is no "line" out there; there are not and never have been proper posts, dug-outs, etc.; not even the usual barbed wire. Only people who had never been out in front could ever have believed that, but nobody was out there before. The men, yes. They got simply sent up. "No 10 Company will furnish so many men to man the front line." Off they went with rations for twenty-four hours. Naturally they did not get far; it was too cold. The next night others came to relieve them. But I do not suppose that responsible officers were ever with them; at any rate, not in recent weeks. Then someone drew a blue line on the map and reported: "The position is firmly in our hands."

When we got back at eight in the morning to the dug-out where the Uhlans have a liaison-post, my little protégé, O., whom I had brought with me from the cavalry, rescued us from the gloomiest reflections with a big glass of vermouth. I had already written, "We are defeated all along the line here." But at that point, to the west of St-Pierre-Vaast Wood, the situation is absolutely hopeless. Certainly it is true that the enemy can hardly get over to us, unless it freezes hard and the ground gets firm, but that is not much of a consolation.

I cut myself out of my heavy overalls with a knife. We had ordered our horses to meet us at the dug-out. Oh, it was good to feel the warm body of a horse beneath one, even



though he was steaming with the wet. So as the day broke we rode away; the enemy was not doing much shooting.

The newspapers know nothing whatever about the situation on the Somme. There are very few people who do.

*January 13, 1917*

One needs a good private reserve of moral confidence in order not to be worn positively to a skeleton by the difficulties here—that is to say, if one is responsible for anything besides oneself. All my work for the last three weeks has just been wasted, thanks for a crop of new movements. We have been sent two regiments of which we know absolutely nothing, and have had to give up two of our old ones. The new ones are not equipped for this front, so everything that they need has to be procured afresh by dint of much battling, begging, and beseeching, and always in face of opposition, which is presumably due to the shortage of material. Once again the ground is cut away from under our feet. A good horse will always pull at the traces; but when he has pulled the same load many, many times he comes after a time to pull less willingly.

*January 20, 1917*

The first A.D.C. is on leave and I am looking after his duties along with my own, which are growing bigger than ever, thanks to fresh movements, changes, and formations. So there is plenty to do. I am glad I am not Divisional A.D.C. His labours are concerned with nothing but decorations, furlough, the posting of officers—in fact, all the real office work. All this in a lump—pah! Never to do anything but read how marvellously deserving someone or other is of the Order of Prince Tommoddy with swords, or of the special War Cross of Honour of some potty little State, all this supported by thousands of testimonials, sketch-maps, extracts from reports, etc., which might just as well have served to support anything else—that's no business for me. All this begging and badgering and boot-licking and sly wangling that they go in

for—really, it is enough to make you sick. The work which has to be spent on it alone is a sin against the man who has to do it. If the ancients had had the bad taste to go in for decorations certainly they would have employed slaves to work through this drivel for them.

*January 20, 1917*

Hard frost all around us. The wilderness of mud is like concrete, and sends up sharp splinters when the shells burst on it. Anybody who goes near St-Pierre-Vaast Wood in this clear weather comes in for some of it. The cold grips your whole body after a few steps in the open air. At night the transport is all muffled up; the steel helmets of the riders balance on the top of shapeless woolly balls, which stick out in the place of heads above the turned-up collars of their coats. The horses move in a cloud of their breath. The sentinels hop busily and yet cautiously from one cold leg on to another which is just as cold. The one thing they love is to dive deep down into the earth to the dug-out which is warm with human life.

The English shells (or maybe the French are behind the English) are not too dangerous. We hardly even duck to them now, so many of them are duds. All is not well either with the enemy. But it appears they are now using against us those monsters which can crawl anywhere over the deepest shell-holes like great tortoises, and shoot at the infantry in the trenches from close to with machine-guns and light cannon. These enormities approach in the dark over all obstacles and open fire in the morning on the garrison of the trenches before our own guns can even find them.

We are evidently in for dirty work. General Headquarters have been moved. Hindenburg's preparations surpass all imagination. Here we are badly off in all respects, but far away behind us we hear the rumble of the troop-trains carrying the latest drafts, which, although they are the last, will yet by a touch of magic become the best. For handfuls of men are being picked out from every company and battery, to be

specially trained for new formations—all those who have proved their worth at the Front and distinguished themselves for bravery or usefulness, the “Old Guard” of the War, not the last drafts from home.

I am sorry to say that everything that goes on back yonder is not so satisfactory. The unscrupulousness of some officers is simply unsurpassable. There is a certain Captain von P. posted to us just now—obviously with the best connections with a name like that, for the family is well beloved of the Supreme War-Lord. He trains young officers at Döberitz, and has been instructed to have a good look round here. On the second day (or on the fourth, to be precise) he confided to me that he had now seen everything, and asked me to report to the G.O.C. division that he would like to take the opportunity to have a look at Lille, Brussels, and the other captured cities. “You know,” he said, “everything that I see here we get sent back to us in reports. These missions are tomfoolery. What can I really do here?” The one and only time that he was sent near a shelled area he turned back, remarking that he was not sent here to get killed, and suddenly discovered an old leg trouble which prevented him from walking. Bets are being freely offered here that, thanks to the yarns which he will spin, and his high connections, he will get the Iron Cross (First Class) for this great deed in four weeks from now, but there are no takers.

The officers trained by such “duds” as he come out to the Front just as conceited, superficial, and pretentious. They are given charge of men, for whose lives and welfare they are supposed to be responsible, when they are not even fit to be made responsible for themselves.

Meanwhile we carry on. I have become a sort of Minister of War in miniature. I am starting a recruiting depot as a reserve of men on whom we can rely; also the third section of an artillery regiment. I am endeavouring to collect horses by hook or by crook, and experimenting with the “Panie horses” harnessed to infantry ammunition carts in order to set free the big ones for the artillery; and much more of the

same kind. Of course, this is all the result of orders from above, but something depends, too, on how the job is done.

*To . . .*

*End of January, 1917*

Well, I have read your letter of the 26th; you can guess how often. I am very far from considering these thoughts and sensations of yours as a passing mood: that would be doing you no credit.

The present is certainly very cheerless and comfortless. It stands to reason that it is the ruin of everything that is tender, fresh, and blooming. Your inward unrest is also clear to my understanding. When you read you get no picture from the words; you would like to write and you cannot. You try to feel whether persons or things bring you any happiness, and you find that you are quite dead to them and that you even feel no pain. Things are like that, and it is proof of your strength that you have held out for so long during periods of loneliness under the blazing sun of war and under the wasting moon of doubt. Now (it seems to you) your strength is at an end.

The soldier in the front line says the same, and means it. He feels himself dead, and lies half dead for days together; but life will not let him go. I do not say that all the light and joy and laughter will return, just as it used to be: that would be folly. Even to hope for it would be beside the mark. But you have just as little right to say that nothing will return, or that this or that will not return. We do not know.

You cannot get rid of life just as you give a servant girl notice. I am the last person to surround myself with broken things which are past service, but I ask permission to convince myself whether they are broken or not. Many of them no doubt will be. You must not try to hang yourself alone with the cord which everyone carries round his neck. We are all in the same boat. Nobody is quite in the right place; nobody is quite happy at his job. Usually the job is not his own one, but has been thrust upon him; or he has taken it

upon himself when it looked different. Every one of us is restless, restless because we are not satisfied with ourselves and this life.

*January 31, 1917*

I am very, very much run down. One gets no sleep here. If one has to have a telephone beside one's bed every night, and anybody can ring one up from anywhere—well, it's wearing. I need my leave very badly.

To gallop in the midday sun through a drift of soft snow into a spray of millions of tiny blue crystals, without a sound and as if enchanted, an hour of that every day is a glorious pick-me-up, but it won't last for long.

*February 12, 1917*

War, which destroys so much, spares much unrightly. At least, it has very unrightly spared a piano which the soldiers in this neighbourhood have rescued. It is about as out of tune as anybody well can be after all this war, but nobody tries to do anything for it, just as nobody tries to do anything for us. Every now and then comes Suzanne Durieux, who washes the basins for the hospital in the church and plays the same piece, half dance-tune, half lullaby, with every time the same stops and mistakes, in the same meaningless, dreary way. I do not know whether it gives her any pleasure, but in spite of all the atrocities which she commits on the war-forgotten piano I do not chase her away. I must say I cannot understand the meaning of this patience. The soldiers are only allowed to maltreat the tuneless object when I am not about, but Suzanne Durieux from the hospital in the church, dirty, common, superficial, and unmusical though she is, may strum. This place is doomed to be destroyed. It is the swan-song of Suzanne Durieux, if Suzanne Durieux can be compared to a swan.

You asked some question recently about whether we realized the dimensions which this War has taken on. For myself I think I can say "Yes," and I find something almost satisfying in the thought that human affairs can assume such



greatness, even though they become terrifying; that the fate of an Œdipus is not the greatest of all; that there is such a thing as the fate of a whole people, merited by itself and endured by itself, a fate so terrific that in the end it matters little whether it was envy, hatred, greed, pride, or ambition which brought it upon it and made it so immense. To contemplate this is great, although frightful too.

*Middle of February, 1917*

After a long battle Ludendorff has taken our Galician transport away from us. The Galician peasants whom we had got to come with us will see their homes again. It leaked out in the end that we had taken them away.

*March 8, 1917*

I was sixty-six hours on the way from Freiburg to Busigny, which is where the division is temporarily resting and binding up its wounds in order to recover strength. About as fast as a stage-coach, but without so much charm and attraction. I got no pleasure either from the journey or from the stops. First of all I waited for two hours of the evening in a nervous Strassburg, without even the opportunity of ministering to my bodily needs at Valentin's. Then came a wait from midnight till half-past one in Metz. I pottered from the waiting-room into the pitch-dark town where there was not a footstep to be heard and not a light showed in the windows, and back again from the dead streets into the half-dead waiting-room, where silent privates smoked bad cigars. The Alsatian wine was so bad that I willingly grant the country to the French; only its price was about on the level of the best Rudesheimer. At 7.30 in the morning I arrived at Mézières, miserably travel-sore, to find that the connection had not taken the trouble to wait for me. The next train did not go until midday, so, to save a little time, I tried a little detour by way of a town lying some twenty-five miles to the north-west. The train took six hours to cover the distance. The wind blew and whistled mercilessly through the old, unheated French carriages, while we stopped

for endless ages in the middle of open fields or on a shaky wooden bridge over some chasm. The express to St-Quentin reached the little town just so late that I might as well have waited for the midday train at Mézières and not frozen for six hours.

What does it all matter, someone will have said already. War is just like any of the other doings of men. When I saw from the window of the waiting train the *Landsturm* sentry guarding the viaduct in wind and rain, I visualized to myself thousand and ten thousand times over the useless waste of men's lives in the service of madness. I, too, was in the same boat. I, too, had to wait and freeze, for it was impossible to grasp a single thought. The *Landsturm* sentry was always before my eyes.

Well, at last that is over. I am in a clean little town, in a fairly clean though not very warm room. My servant is here; the horses are well; mud and slime are right away in front. The place is inhabited, which is a curious experience. We are out at rest, and shall presumably not be called upon until a withdrawal has been effected. English prisoners confirm the report that the enemy intended to cut off the whole of the position in St-Pierre-Vaast Wood which we have just abandoned.

P.S.—I'm sorry, but please will you steal me some shaving-soap; I don't care from whom.

March 13, 1917

I have just read Sir Douglas Haig's report on the Somme battle to his lordship, the Minister of War. It is almost deliberate and studied in its mediocrity, and tedious enough for any lord. Also one is tempted to call it superficial and irrelevant; not because it is untrue or over-coloured, but because whole passages of the memorandum are filled with outpourings about the "brave," the "wonderful," the "glorious" Allies who "are fighting on in perfect agreement," and the same expressions are repeated again *ad nauseum* about the English troops. The vagueness of the account, which is sufficiently

self-evident, is heightened by all this immaterial stuffing, so that in the end one gets the impression that the whole composition is just a dummy filled with sawdust, without any life, without any soul, without the least creative spirit. Anything has more life in it than this report of Douglas Haig or his intelligence officer. Now then! Is one to believe that generals of a nation which has produced Frederick the Great, Schlieffen, Clausewitz, Moltke, and the victor of Tannenberg are not the equal of this puppet of a general without ideas and without imagination? That is the question which puzzles me most of all.

Douglas Haig is a general who gets no fun out of the War. War is not his business or he would have something to say about it. He admits that he groans continually under the burden of his task, and is astonished to the depths of his being that he manages to do so much of it. Therein he is typical of the whole English people in its attitude towards the War. It began as an expedition; its troops were called "expeditionary forces." England has never waged wars in such a way that the soul of the people entered into them, and I do not believe that that is the case in this War. She fights without enthusiasm, as one fights against mice or other vermin, without putting one's heart into it. I tell you now: if only Germany could attain to real inspiration, she would still win the war; it matters little whether it is a Maid of Orleans, or a prophet, or an idea which sets the spark alight. I dream of an inspiration for Germany.

*To . . .*

*March 15, 1917*

How extraordinarily near our thoughts must be when we are separated in this time of varied experience, if two letters like our two last could cross one another. So you think that even Luther would be inadequate for times like these, that religion and theosophy (which you seem to have dug up from the past) are things "which have had their day," that "Goethe himself is no help." All that is desperately true, I grant you;

and here am I clamouring for inspiration for Germany, or rather for the whole world.

It is a fact that fine speeches about duty and Fatherland are as worn out as broken-down cab-horses. At the best only the padres who make them derive any inspiration from them. The War is devoid of all grandeur. It no longer heaves itself up from its depths like the ocean in storm. The human soul is absorbed entirely by the struggle against distress and disaster. With this millstone round its neck it faints and fails. The living are a sorrier sight than the millions of dead. Not a soul is at liberty to make use of his natural gifts, either behind the lines or here at the front. The seat of war is thronged with persons who have no message to give the fighting-man, except to urge him to be one; they cannot even offer us the enthusiasm of those first weeks. The word "peace" has fallen into disrepute, as though it had become marked with some filthy blight or mould. The forces which the nations are bringing into play are gigantic, amazing, almost uncanny, but the sight of them arouses no enthusiasm. They excite feelings of disgust rather than admiration, such as one might feel for the sea or a waterfall, a flood or a conflagration. No great name, no personality dominates them. No nation appears really greater than another.

*Same date*

Our operation is proceeding, and apparently without a hitch. Two English prisoners were taken while they were trying to set up a notice-board with the words "When are you going to retire?" They seem to know everything, but evidently cannot do anything serious to stop us.

*March 19, 1917*

The withdrawal of the line from the hopeless positions on the Somme has been effected without loss. A fearful zone of deliberately devastated territory has been left as a barrier between us and the enemy. The expulsion of the inhabitants from their little towns and villages was a heart-rending busi-

ness, more ghastly than murder. The thought that their houses and homes, with all that they had tended through a lifetime, were to be destroyed drove many of them out of their wits. The priest of the little place where I was billeted had a stroke at the news. Women hurled themselves out of the windows, and among the disorderly processions of refugees streaming to the rear one could see cases for whom this fate was as good as death.

It is an eternal shame for the English that this operation cost us no losses. It was a safe calculation to assume that the immensity of the facts would leave Sir Douglas Haig entirely without inspiration. For four days and four nights the troops were passing through our village. For hours the overloaded motor-lorries thundered through in a cloud of fumes, until the cobble-stones were reduced to a sort of moraine of irregular rubble. A retreat is a fearfully costly business; that no lives were lost this time is really great.

What does this Russian revolution mean? I take it that the Tsar has driven so deep into the mud that even a new driver will take some time to get out again. It is extraordinary how long a nation will allow itself to be misgoverned.

*March 27, 1917*

I awoke out of an amazing dream this morning. I dreamed that it was night, and that the sky was lit with stars, stars such as had never shone before. The whole heaven far and near was filled with the most beautiful star-patterns, the tracery of which shimmered and sparkled throughout its whole extent. Right over the town, or rather over the whole country, there was a brilliant eight-pointed cross of stars, in which, however, the severe form of the cross did not make itself unpleasantly noticeable, for round each star were lots of golden rings which touched and intersected the rings of the next ones in a criss-cross maze of fine lines of fire, so that the whole sky seemed to be vibrating at the same time. The stars were set in wreaths and rings, and all simultaneously sent out rays. Where the rays met they produced a sort of golden wave, like the



wave-effect an old master would have painted if he had seen the sight.

Everybody went out of the town to admire the heavenly illumination; nobody stayed at home. They all lay down at the forest's edge, and far and wide over the hills on white couches which lay ready spread. Everybody gazed aloft in silence, and so fell asleep. You were with me, and you lay in my arms. Not far from us were my father and my brother, with his charming wife and four charming children.

We all went to sleep and woke again at dawn, when the stars in the sky slowly and solemnly dissolved into a golden haze. Thereupon we all went back into the town together, and everybody began to celebrate and rejoice—when I awoke.

Now, just tell me where a dream like that comes from, at this time, above all, when (God knows!) we've small cause to be cheerful. I tell myself that it proves that human beings have the power within them to get the better of these times, and that it is wrong not to rely on that power just because we cannot summon it at will.

*March 30, 1917*

I am lying sick, with a cold all over my head, if you can say that. I do not want to go into hospital because it is not so easy to get out again, so I am fighting it down here, although it is not a very safe thing to do when one's ear-passages are inflamed and one has pains in the head. The pink walls of the room which I have to put up with make me feel sick and wretched.

You can imagine how pleasant it was when about twelve o'clock last night big R. slipped quite quietly into my room with a bottle of wine under his arm and a sort of taken-for-granted look on his face. The bottle looked very small beside his six feet of length. He sat down beside my bed and we sipped a few glasses of the blessed year 1911. The wine had been bought as must by his father, a magistrate on the Rhine, who knows every vineyard in Germany. It pleases me to hear of a man who makes a careful habit of buying his wine

as young as possible in order to give it every opportunity of developing well, and who then enjoys it by preference alone with his sons and friends, temperately and on the right occasion, when both he and his companion can put style and appreciation into the drinking. I pictured myself in the old man's company. I felt how this wine suited him, noble, clean, and well tended, nothing extravagant about it—a gentlemanly, personable wine with a distinction of its own, full of worth and yet not pretentious, full of taste and yet original. To my mind the manner of the old gentleman represents a bit of what I call culture, and that does me good.

Old R. said that he had wanted to drink up the bottle with me because the others understood nothing about it, but I suppose what he really meant (though he had probably never thought it out) was that the others would not only have made nothing of the wine, but, above all, nothing of its history and how it had grown to greatness in his father's house. There he was probably right. As we drank we talked for a good hour about wine and wine-buying on the Rhine, and of how it used to be done differently, about gold cigarette-cases, about Lettré, and about horses and men. What pleased me most, however, was that he should have taken pleasure not only in the drinking, but in the circumstances of the drinking, which he certainly did, although he only dimly understood why.

*March 31, 1917*

I have already written about the result of the withdrawal of the Somme Army to the Siegfried Line (sounds uncommonly like the theatre!). Although we can flatter ourselves on the helplessness of the English, our own becomes now unpleasantly apparent. Our troops have had no successes; everybody wanted to get away as quick as possible; they were not going to risk fighting. In St-Pierre-Vaast Wood, according to the latest reports, there seems to have been a sort of tacit understanding between our people and the Scottish: "Set no traps for us and we'll let you out." Although our troops knew the ground, no prisoners were taken (with a few

exceptions). It was thought that there would be plenty. Once again, as formerly in Flanders, we should have had a cavalry brigade on our flank. When it arrived it was much too late (not from any fault of its commanders). The English had cavalry on the spot at once, and the day before yesterday our G.O.C. and one of the A.D.C.'s nearly rode into them and got captured. Unfortunately I was not there.

The English speak of an enthusiastic reception by the inhabitants, but that only means about twenty thousand old women and cripples who had been left concentrated at one or two points. All the rest of the inhabitants, who were transportable and whose services might have been useful to the enemy on the spot, were evacuated. So the shouts of joy must have been on rather a cracked note, and there cannot have been many fair maidens to welcome the victors.

In the meantime there is no sign of the end.

*To his Father*

*April 3, 1917*

Easter letters ought to talk about resurrection, unless they happen to be written to children, in which case Easter eggs may be mentioned. But this year it is harder to do so than usual. There is nothing to be resurrected, even if one looks for help to the spring, which usually (in default of a God) keeps loyal tryst each year. Even the spring lies still in the grave, like the dead of the War. As to Gods there's nothing doing. There is just as little resurrection in the human body and soul, and it is now about two years since the first primitive enthusiasm engendered by the War passed away. All our efforts are so entirely concentrated on warding off dire distress in every form that they even absorb the soul and apply it to the same task. It has no chance to wander free, let alone to soar. No important invention or discovery, no masterpiece of art, no fresh creative development for the State or the community, no noble piece of building, no poem of original feeling have these fallow years produced. No man in the whole of Europe has been able to do what he might have done had

his powers had free play, except for perhaps twenty or thirty for whom war is so completely their profession that they can stand it as a permanent condition of affairs or when it comes to be a struggle for life. Even the regular officer sickens of war and yearns for his great or little resurrection, each according to his measure. Of the troops themselves I do not speak. They do their best in war as they did in peace, and their qualities find employment. But the other qualities, the highest of all, lie idle. Under the morbid conditions governing the human mind no Helmholtz to-day can invent an ophthalmoscope, no Dalton can discover the laws governing all chemical elements, no Messel can design a building like Wertheim's, no Goethe can write lines like "Ueber allen Gipfeln." Can there be men who look out from their observatories with a telescope into the limitless space to search for new stars, unoppressed by the war? Can there be musicians who explore the harmonies. It does not seem so; no one knows of any. Although this loss may only be a *lucrum cessans*, it strikes me as more overpowering than anything else, or rather more depressing, because it is quite immeasurable. The loss in crops, in trade, even in human lives, can be made up with the years; it can be calculated and provided against. The drying-up of the souls of all the nations is a much greater thing, and the season for the fruit which might have been beyond the ordinary may perhaps never come again, because the tree which might have borne it will not be at its full strength when Peace comes.

A man who has any feeling for these and other such things cannot easily find the right frame of mind for Easter. One gets used up. The whole business becomes more soulless every day, because we are all going downhill. One cannot shake off the effect of the War as one would that of a drinking bout; it is always there. I say this really less of myself than of all of us. I suppose I am better off than most because I have more resources to draw on than the rest; but of this I am sure—that there is not a single man who will be any better for the War, in spite of Ludendorff and the big reputation he carries.

At the moment perhaps Russia has the chance of producing a Napoleon. That would be something to inspire one even at a distance. But for ourselves I see nothing. Nowadays a shepherd girl does not stand much of a chance, and we are too well educated to listen to a prophet. Founders of a new religion are not easy to find, and we should have to crucify them first. That means we shall have to wait years. . . .

I think you would be interested in the situation on this front as it is left by the withdrawal of an army in action. The operation itself went off quite without incident, and the object has certainly been attained. The English will leave us in peace here, and this section will be marked "Quiet." Hindenburg has now got about thirty-three divisions to spare, so far as one can tell, partly through this business and partly by creating new formations. I am now anxious to see whether he will succeed in employing them on a uniform plan. Anyway, this figure is remarkable when you come to think that at the worst period of the Somme battle the whole First Army reserve was reduced to one battalion.

*April 5, 1917. Easter week*

Our list of dead grows longer; and yet, is there not something unearthly in the bare idea of resurrection? Think how those people must have felt on their Easter morning's walk (the first, the original one, I mean), when the women went out with the couple of men, hesitating before the rite which they had to perform, to roll away the stone from the grave, and realized that the Resurrection had happened. How can those hearts have endured the tremendous peal of joy which sounded within them? They must have felt the ground give way beneath them. The world in its revolutions, the stars in their courses, the ever-rolling ages must have seemed vanquished before them; for they knew that the Resurrection had taken place.

*MARETZ, April 8, 1917*

His Excellency the General is celebrating his birthday. With the help of a regimental band, a dull speech by the



G.S.O.I (dull because it has to be the usual thing), the last available bad champagne, and a dinner menu somewhat beyond the ordinary, we are supposed to get ourselves into the right mood. God knows, I would rather be in the front line exchanging shots with the English—if only to find myself again. I went for a ride this morning, but when I came back to the stable I realized that I had gone most of the way at a walk. In short, nothing seems to go right, and I have lost myself, which is not a pleasant experience.

The Indian cavalry, whom I should so much have liked to meet, have not shown themselves again. Presumably they were merely sent ahead as cover against traps and ambushes, and were withdrawn again as soon as the English get bolder. They are getting bolder. Their aeroplanes fly quite low over our lines, searching trenches and tracks with machine-gun fire. Our own airmen invariably appear on the scene too late. On the other hand, our Air Force has far the better of the English high-flying squadrons, and we often see fights in the air in which the enemy aeroplane is struck down to earth, just as a bird is struck by a hawk. Otherwise this is becoming a quiet sector. Of course, that does not mean anything for the division, for any day we may be sent somewhere else.

*April 17, 1917*

We are being relieved and moved, and consequently frightfully busy. In particular I have no notion how to get horses to move our infantry transport, our gun ammunition, ourselves, or our guns. In the old days in Galicia, when I ruled over a remount depot, things were different, but here one is disarmed. The Army order that all horses which are returned to veterinary depots on account of mange remain "on the strength" of their units leads to the most deceptive statistics (I think that in some respects Ludendorff is the best lair on earth), but does not help one forward. If they are in hospital, with their coats all eaten away and half-starved with the treatment, they will not pull any guns and wagons.

April 18, 1917

What a mess we are in! The enemy attacks where he likes and stops where he likes. We have to stand fast and meet every thrust, even at points where it hurts us. Ludendorff must needs christen this "The Defensive Battle." His *Instructions for the Defensive Battle* are in many cases not being followed, or else being misunderstood, or turning out to be impracticable. The fact is that the old law and relationship between attack and defence is being tried out once again on ourselves.

The enemy's strategy is quite clear. He attacks hard at Arras. The moment that we have got sufficient forces together to meet the next shock he stops almost before he has suffered loss. Then he attacks somewhere else in superior strength—this time at Rheims. When we are strong enough on that front he will stop again and begin once more at Arras or elsewhere. From now on he will keep us constantly on the run. There will be no end to it until we have had our fill. On the whole I should not be surprised if the English, backed by an unused American army, came out on top at the last. Already we have to put up with too much mediocrity. We economize in material because we have to, whereas the enemy has enough and to spare. If the German war correspondents find our troops marvellous, I don't know whether they have any experience of the English troops. What is the good of our people doing their utmost in face of these odds?

April 22, 1917

We are moving to the Arras front. I rode north yesterday. The troops came up by rail. We have got unheard-of masses of English in front of us, and everything they do gives proof of sureness and deliberation.

April 24, 1917

Something very unpleasant has happened up at the Front, though we do not yet know what. We are being suddenly put into the line to relieve a division which was being held in readiness for a big counter-stroke. There is now practically

nothing left of it; it seems to be completely used up, and yet no one will say how it happened.

The English have taken Monchy, fifteen miles to the southwest of Douai, and thus threaten our position, which runs to the east of it (or did yesterday), most awkwardly.

One thing we can say—it is not the fault of our airmen if we are in a bad way. Richthofen has his quarters quite close to us. He has had his “birds” painted red, and when the red birds go up no Englishman shows himself over our lines. His principal trophy is the machine-gun of an Englishman who had shot down thirty-two Germans. He shows it off as a sportsman might show the head of a stag. He is very careful, says that he sometimes has to get within twenty yards’ range. Fighting is his sole job. He does no reconnaissance flights or other missions. He simply sits and waits for the telephone to report an enemy here or there. He counts no opponent as destroyed unless he has shot down his machine and seen it crash; to have driven him down to earth and forced him to land is not good enough for him. He calls that another miss, and, besides, he does not consider it worth while. His formation has not lost a single machine for some weeks. These chasers are really fine fellows. They set out to be so, and the strict training and temperance to which their leader keeps them during the time in which they are liable to have to fight shows itself in their physical condition.

BEFORE ARRAS, *April 26, 1917*

I am sitting on a little chest, in the top of which I keep my writing materials. Round about me are clerks and orderlies, telephones and motor-cycles, dispatch-riders and officers, constantly coming and going. There is no trench or dug-out here. We are losing men for nothing, and can get no help from the rear. My work is done, and I have just to wait for the result. We were put in to relieve regiments which had been reduced to shreds. The prospect that our own regiments will not be able to hold out more than a few days if things go on like this is almost a consolation, because we have almost forgotten

what that means. I have seen men go by me who did not know what they were doing, bodies without brains, creatures bereft of their senses. One imagined that they might never recover them.

*April 29, 1917*

The situation is somewhat clearer and better. Our regiments appear to be holding. It is no wonder that the English were able to gain ground against the battered and deadened remnants which we relieved. All the same, it is probable that, if our losses continue at the same rate as during the last five days, we shall not be able to hold out more than another ten. Calculations like these are frightful.

*BEFORE ARRAS, May 2, 1917*

Fortunately the Americans have been selling the English bad shells in return for their good money. Hundreds of thousands out of the millions fired are "duds." All the same, there are plenty left over for our poor fellows.

*May 4, 1917*

It is coming quicker than I thought. Yesterday and last night the English attacked furiously. They made some progress at first at the cost of the most frightful losses, but at the same time they have damaged us to such an extent that the division, although it fought even better than could have been expected and actually advanced a bit, has got to be taken out. The relief may be postponed for a couple of days more, according to what troops are available to take its place. As soon as it is over I shall go on leave, together with the General, who is completely exhausted.

*To his Father*

*May 14, 1917*

I see from your lines that one of my letters, written during the fighting at Arras, must have gone astray. It contained some plain speaking about the senselessness of our first losses there,

which have rightly and properly caused one or two of the responsible people to be broken, so I hope it fell into the hands of somebody who could make good use of the information.

The division distinguished itself particularly in the fighting for Chérisy. The battalions which were employed there were enfiladed first from the left and then from the right; the village was attacked from in front, from the north, and from the south, when the reserves of the regiments in the line were brought up, and at the same time the machine-gun companies of the first battalions were able to pour an annihilating flanking fire northwards and southwards into the attacking forces, so that they suffered enormous losses. Our own losses are exaggerated by the troops at present because they cannot see them in perspective, and because they feel themselves weak owing to all sorts of shortages which are not in the end to be counted as losses. They have a natural longing to get out of it as soon as possible. For instance, during our twelve days' spell in the line we did not lose more than 400 other ranks killed and 1,200 wounded and missing; 10 officers killed, 24 wounded, and two missing. This period included three heavy days' fighting, of which the bloodiest (May 1st and the following night) lasted thirty-six hours.

Personally I had a great deal of luck at Arras. One time my duties in the line fell on a quiet day. Another time the shooting was fairly sparse. A third day there was a heavy drum-fire down on the sector which I had to visit, but I was able to wait in safety on the fringe until it was over. For the time being we are quartered behind the Second Army, employed in ironing out our creases, but the troops will not get thoroughly fresh again until they are put to quite different work in which they can take some pleasure.

*Same date*

The much-advertised U-boat war does not seem to be troubling the English much. The reports speak of thousands of tons of shipping sunk every day, but they seldom say what the tonnage represents. I should say nothing. It is evident



that among all these millions there are not more than a few thousand tons of grain, and they have not got a single troop transport yet. Poor Michael does not realize that. Obviously they know how to protect their grain-ships and transports.

SOMME AREA, *May 29, 1917*

The English in front of us are troubling us less than the English over our heads. For the time being they are very much at home up there. There is no Richthofen or Bölcke to attack them, so squadrons of twenty to thirty machines pay us the compliment of appearing every day punctually at the same time. There is a great crash of falling bombs, which burst unpleasantly flat and wide, and a thudding cannonade from the anti-aircraft guns, which have never brought down a machine yet, so far as I have been able to see. All the same, they have the advantage of keeping the enemy machine-guns and bombs at a reasonable distance.

The English are separated from us by the wilderness which we created in our retreat. They have very little except artillery in action forward. Our own trenches are kept practically empty and the dug-outs are very well planned. All the same, the English are so well informed through air photographs of the position of our batteries that they are liable to knock one of our guns to bits at any moment. On the whole, however, they are moderately well behaved. They have nothing but dismounted cavalry in their front lines. The infantry are digging trenches at a considerable distance to the rear. They are blowing St-Quentin to bits at long range, but it will be some time before it is reduced to the sort of uniform rubbish-heap which is of no use to anybody.

The comparative quiet round about does not extend to me. Training schemes, remounts, new equipment, and all the general refitting of man, beast, and material, which is always necessary when it has been impossible for some time, are keeping me on the run. To-morrow I have to inspect four hundred horses, the day after to-morrow five hundred men,

the next day more horses—if, indeed, what one has to inspect can be called men and horses. My tours and excursions are not particularly encouraging.

Recently one of them took me to Beaurevoir, a village which has been beautified by having the trenches of our second line cut clean through the middle of it. I hope that one day the monument to Joan of Arc will find a grave in one of them. It is at least as hideous as the average German war memorial with a full-bosomed Germania on its pedestal. The lady owns a statue in Beaurevoir because she was once a prisoner of the Count of Luxembourg in one of its cellars (which is, of course, still to be seen). Naturally the inhabitants had a whole library about her in the *Mairie*. Now it is only read by a few scoffers, while the other relics of the Maid—a bit of chain mail, an iron spur, and the remnant of a scarf (relics are always genuine)—lie about neglected. Anyone who wanted to make a business of such things could easily annex the spur of the Maid, the little bit of mail, and the shred of her scarf, but such things cause me no amusement, unless they are completely left to their fate; and so I let them be, like a joke which has no sense except in its place of origin, and which has never been made anywhere else. All the same, as I rode back to my quarters I ruminated sadly, as so often before, over the things by which human faith and superstition are sustained.

May 31, 1917

The War crawls along like a car without petrol, a horse without any oats, or a human being without any joy in life. General Pétain is regrouping his troops. It seems to me as if the world were slaving away at a jig-saw puzzle and nobody could find the right pieces to finish with. At first they all know what pieces to take and where to put them, but after that they stick. They try one possible or impossible solution after another with the idea that it will lead to the finish. With the balance of forces as they are now this game will never come to an end; it is a gloomy outlook for us, who represent the pieces.

When I wrote the date up above it occurred to me how fast the time runs away from us. We go on without any uplift, without any enthusiasm, without any real result. We are getting towards the middle of the year, and it seems to me as if Christmas had only just passed. Everything remains where it was, only more comfortless than ever. We go on sleeping, fighting, starving through this period, which some call great. Nothing counts. Each man has to help himself by himself from day to day and from night to night. It is about as dreary as papering and furnishing one's own prison cell. I do not speak of myself; so far as I am concerned I can get out on top and move about in all sorts of places from which I can bring back some spark of interest; but I see it in the others. What these fellows have come to! When they get let out of their prison they will be broken men. A good thing that the world is blind and knows nothing about it.

*To . . .*

*June 7, 1917*

There exists somewhere a Food Supplies Board, but its ways are dark. We both of us seem to have been taking private lessons from it, for does it not look as if we were following one of its rules when you send me chocolate to the Front and I simultaneously send you chocolate from the Front? I thought I should be supplying a want; you thought the same; in the same way all over Germany potatoes are journeying for mysterious reasons from Hamburg to Breslau, while at the same time, for equally mysterious reasons, other potatoes are journeying from Breslau to Hamburg. This sort of thing is not a laughing matter. If they tried their very hardest human beings could not do more to obstruct.

Reason is everywhere being turned to folly. The Supreme Army Command is bound to economize. For this reason it offers prize money for valuable war material which is found and salvaged—particularly for gun ammunition, such as, for instance, gets left behind when a battery changes position in a hurry, or falls out of an overturned or wrecked limber at

night, or gets lost on the way by transport going up to the front. This has resulted in the troops organizing salvage parties. And now this is what happens. The salvage parties steal the gun ammunition from the forward positions for the sake of the prize money. Suppose that an ammunition column has hauled its shells painfully and laboriously through mud and slime under fire from the enemy to somewhere in the neighbourhood of a battery, and deposited them there as best it may; the next night the salvage parties haul them back again to the dumps at the peril of their lives, through the same mud and slime, and again under the enemy's fire, and so earn their prize money.

FLANDERS, *June 10, 1917*

Once again I am quartered in the same dead-alive town, strangely and unnaturally waked to life by the war, in which I got my first impressions of this country. Perhaps I shall end the war here, where I began it. The town has become poorer, the old curiosity shops have been bought out, and are now filled again with things that are old indeed but bad, for at all times people made both good stuff and bad stuff. The food supplies are scarce and dear, but, even so, much more plentiful than at home.

The English are supposed to be going to make some sort of an attack from the sea, either against Holland or Ostend. Our divisions were originally intended for an attack on the ill-fated Wytschaete salient, now only a vain dream. There once again we made the terrible mistake of collecting too many troops in a space which was threatened from both sides, without letting them attack at the right time. The English launched their offensive at the two extremes of the salient, leaving the point untouched. They were successful on both sides, and cut off everything which was gripped between the two claws of the great pincers. Fortunately as this was anticipated, it only amounted to a few hundreds, certainly not more than five thousand men.

In Flanders the country is now in the plenitude of its fertility. The wheat stands higher than a man, the pasture is fat, and the cattle are fat; in the meadows, which are cut up by narrow dykes, graze mares with foals of colossal proportions; everywhere the soil of the fields and gardens is carefully weeded and kept free from stones. How often have I described it all! It almost makes me melancholy to see it; all this blue and silver, these people, these beasts. We have as our provisional headquarters a great baroque town hall, with one hall after another, and room upon room. For years it has been sound asleep. Now it is being stirred out of its repose and is perhaps waking up; but its new tenants don't understand it; it would be better if it went to sleep again.

BRUGES, *June 12, 1917*

On the move again. No sooner are we in our quarters than we have to turn out again. They are very panicky here. If the English bombard a little longer or a little farther afield than usual, at once a whole division is alarmed and sent into position before anybody knows what the bombardment is aiming at. It is not a big move, but it makes a bad impression on us all. The troops are squeezed up together like sheep in a pen, and as our men badly needed a period of training they are none the better for it. For ourselves it means double work, with the unpleasant feeling, both before and afterwards, that it is all for nothing.

Do you know Damme, the old port of Bruges and the home of Eulenspiegel? There is really nothing particular to see there except a calm, complete sort of harmony, which spreads over all. There is a tower which seems magnificent because it is a real tower, a town hall which is dignified and imposing, a few warehouses, and some low fishermen's huts and sailors' taverns. It is all so genuine, so entirely unspoilt by any foreign influence, so entirely independent on its own ground, that it is refreshing to see, although it is really dead. For though it belongs to the past it has kept its countenance.



BRUGES, *Beginning of June*, 1917

The Memlings and the other treasures are kept in the cellars, and only occasionally brought to the daylight by special request, for the town is bombed by airmen.

*Whit-Sunday*, 1917

We all need tongues of fire over our heads; we all look up to Heaven without hope. Apparently there are to be no outpourings of the Holy Spirit for us, and the question arises whether it is Mankind or Heaven which has become unfit for such things. In spite of all the world rolls on in such a splendour as almost oppresses sights and senses, body and soul. The days follow one another like laughing heroes who care nothing for the War. One sea of blossom pours over into another. Hardly has the white wave of the fruit-trees washed itself away than the red wave of the great May-trees rises in its place. No storm has come to break the charm of this spring-time, no hail has shattered its pure perfection. The nights are hard to bear; one sinks down after another like perfumed goddesses on their beds. The nightingale's song throbs, lilac overpowers the senses, and round about in the darkness the rutting cattle wander restlessly in the pastures.

This is the May-time of this year and this country. It is hard to hold up one's head to it, for Man is not like a tree which stands still and allows the beneficence of the sun and the rain, the night and the day, to pass over it as a matter of course. He is always at war, with his days and with his nights, with beauty, too. When these nights begin to overpower me I feel I should like to mount and ride upon them, and when the morning comes to measure itself with me I rise to meet it.

Is it only so with me, or is this common to us all? Is it always senseless to struggle? If I resist surely some day there must be mastery, surely some day I shall win through to safety? When one has learnt one's lesson surely there will be an end to such nights as these for the man who suffers them, and these dawns will break no more. Other, more

ordinary ones will come, with which there will be no need to struggle because they will no longer oppress one.

NEAR OSTEND, *June 17, 1917*

When one can make the bold assertion that one has done one's day's work one can allow oneself to drive out in the evening in a little Belgian cart to Ostend. I was there a few days ago and was able to assure myself that everything there has very much gone down except the sea. Von W. and I scraped together a supper of scraps, without bread or meat, in a little Belgian tavern in the Langstraat. There was some French champagne on the wine-card which had been overlooked by others owing to the poor appearance of the place. It seemed to me too stupid not to take advantage of this opportunity. By luck we happened on a fresh catch of sole, which the fishermen were just bringing in. We bought one cheap in the street, and carried it, so to speak, alive and kicking into the kitchen. I had collected the last thirteen foreign cigars out of little-known and overlooked boxes in the well-known cigar shop. The English are pitching heavy shells on to the harbour and the station yard, but they are evidently sparing the houses on the Promenade, and the miserable giraffe house which they call a Kursaal. There are some submarines waiting to be repaired in the docks, and a big destroyer which has left half its body behind somewhere and is waiting to have another piece put on. The number of bathing machines is reduced to about twenty, and only the smart lieutenants of "my Navy," as the Kaiser calls it, keep up the tradition and stride out of the villas in which they have been living for the last three years across the sand into the waves, as though fashion dictated it so. Apart from them there are some figures to be seen here which would not be amiss in the middle-class bathing resorts of Germany. If one considers that on them depends the continuation of the German race one can only look forward to a further series of fat bellies, short legs, bald heads, and sunken breastbones, which fit well enough with their broad, fleshy noses, thick ears, and

flat feet. The one or two people who attract attention by their good appearance are exceptions.

There is still nothing warlike doing here for the time being. We are waiting for events, but I do not think anybody knows what events. The war seems to be settling down into the dullness of the dog-days before the calendar really warrants it.

*June 24, 1917*

This is supposed to be the lull before the storm which is to break upon us simultaneously from land and sea. It has produced unexpected work and exertion, since greater preparations than ever are being made to receive the English when they come.

Recently I went with my General to reconnoitre the positions of the Marine Brigade; they are in the dunes, right in front of Nieuport, and just to the south of Lombaertzyde. I must say they don't inspire much confidence. Once a proper barrage comes down upon them all the trenches, concrete observation posts, and barbed wire will go up to heaven in a column of dust or a cloud of sand. The sailors are convinced that their position is impregnable; they have certainly worked quite hard at it, and could not have done better, but since the autumn of 1914, when they lost the important sluice-gates of the Yser at Nieuport, they have learnt nothing about the War as it has been waged on the Somme and the Aisne, at Arras and Wytschaete. Near the northern extremity of the Front there sits an N.C.O. behind a wall of sandbags only a few feet away from the waves. Here the enemy's position is only seventeen metres away from our own. When once one has had the curiosity to put one's head up cautiously under its steel helmet in order to enjoy the thrill, one pops it down again quick enough. There one can see with the naked eye the little mirror of the sniper with the telescopic sights. The whole position can be surveyed through a stereoscopic telescope from a raised position known as the Puma. The Wolf, the Hyæna and the Polecat are progressively smaller creatures

which are sited in front of the Puma. From there one can see how weak it all is. One cannot feel much confidence either in the coast fortifications and batteries. I take it that English men-of-war could give them a good shelling without running much risk. They tried it recently, and masked themselves for the purpose in a cloud of artificial white mist, which lay all round the fighting ships and made it quite impossible to aim from our side. However diligently one bombards a cloud of mist there is plenty of room in it in which to miss.

At the end of the barbed-wire entanglements, half out of the water, lie several dead cattle, shapeless and stinking—victims of the U-boats.

*June 25, 1917*

The Army Remount Depot is in the square at Ghent and partly in the buildings of the 1913 Exhibition. I can no longer allow myself to send parties there to fetch horses; they let the most hopeless, useless, and abominable stuff be foisted upon them; consequently I have to go myself, but the quest is not very encouraging. What things they do call horses nowadays! It is the same everywhere, one must admit. Consider what is now passed off as leather, boots, and cloth. If it is the same with the guns they cannot be much good.

*July 3, 1917*

To-day only a pound of grain per head was issued for the horses, and the field-post people report that the troops are asking to have bread sent them from home. Granted that the human being pays too much attention to his inside when he is thinking of saving his body, and too little when it is a question of his soul, all the same it is appalling that within half a year after the defeat of Russia there should not be enough corn available.

Human labour is no more good; only the earth still does its duty in places. You should see this country! Fields of corn so high that one could almost drown in them. They bend and give at the knees under the weight of ears larger than I have

ever seen before. The oats stand breast high. The wheat is as close and thick as a golden fleece, and in these parts, when they cut the clover, they stand it up in sheaves.

*July 8, 1917*

In our northern corner there is every sign of a colossal action on both sides. Our reconnoitring airmen come up against a tremendous enemy barrage, against which five of our machines smashed themselves up almost simultaneously on the same spot. Richthofen has been badly wounded. Canvas camps of 200 or more big tents appear overnight like mushrooms; there are whole towns of new hutments; munition dumps are being established close up to the front; busy movements of infantry; unrest everywhere. That is what we see on the enemy's side. On our own we are closing up. The troops are equipped for special duties and trained as for a stage play. Of course, the reality is always different from what one thinks, but what is one to do? Neither officers nor men can do without a rehearsal; brilliant improvisations are no good.

When forces on both sides are strained like this the individual feels the strain too. It becomes too much, but nowadays one is not simply thrown straight into a red-hot furnace as used to be the case. One lines up, so to speak, for the business, and this experience is slightly less unpleasant than the other.

*July 11, 1917*

Another move yesterday, the seventeenth in the last ten months, according to the Judge-Advocate, who pays no attention to events unless they can be considered statistically. We are nearer than ever to the sea, and packed as tight as can be—men, horses, wagons, and guns—all on top of one another. The Marine Brigade is being withdrawn and army troops taking its place everywhere. In the English lines the transport trains follow one upon another. The front-line trenches are already packed with storm-troops. Yesterday evening our divisions captured the salient which they were defending on this side of the Yser estuary by a surprise attack with 140



batteries—a “beach picnic,” as it was called in orders. An artillery operation on a tiny area. Bang! All went well because it was well prepared. It has taken us long enough to learn that it does not do simply to order an attack for the next day, but that everything must be reconnoitred and prepared beforehand.

*July 13, 1917*

It is always more or less wearisome to wait in an anteroom, even when it is that of the theatre of war. In every case one settles oneself twenty-five times or more, puts oneself straight, and feels about to see that everything is handy, but one is perfectly clear that it is a wearisome business. It does not help to know that the sparrows in the street, the starlings in the poplar trees, and our agents in Switzerland are all singing the same song about the great British offensive on land and sea. They even know the day more or less exactly, as well as how many of the new type of monitor, how many aeroplanes, and what divisions are to take part in it; but all that is not amusing, because a man necessarily finds the most beautiful curtain less interesting than the worst play. In such a case the only thing to do is to stick it; that is all there is to be said.

Meanwhile the half-year has once again gone by. Nature does not spare herself. There is not a tree or an animal which takes precautions for the future. Everything that lives, lives for the day, and does not worry about its end. This prodigality is overwhelming. The roses flower just as passionately as if their one purpose in life were to bloom and fall. The fruits ripen on the tree as if they set store on breaking off from the sap of life and falling to the ground as soon as they possibly could. The corn sinks under the weight of its own ears, which it developed too quickly. They won't wait for anything. . . .

*To . . .*

*July 18, 1917*

Your last few lines from your Berlin address say that that city seems to you to be inwardly decayed, but you don't write

a word about it, not even about the people who live there and whose life we used to share. I grant you that it seemed absolutely revolting during these last few days, to judge by its public life. Even nervousness can become a scandal, and that in Berlin certainly was so. In addition there was self-seeking of the most disgusting and callous sort, bestial fear of losing business and profits, of so-called popular sentiment and of imaginary impossibilities. The Berlin newspapers behaved as no similar foreign newspaper would behave; we could compare their tone, for we get a plentiful supply of foreign papers.

In speaking of the events in Berlin I do not include the change of the Chancellor. Bethmann-Hollweg commanded no confidence whatever abroad, so he had become an impossibility. But does his successor command it? Bismarck was well known in St. Petersburg, London, and Paris long before he became a Prussian Minister. Michaelis is entirely unknown; consequently he is just as badly placed and will be just as much mistrusted as his predecessor. Have political parties and majorities in the whole course of human history ever done the right thing when it came to making changes? They will not succeed in producing either one sort of peace or the others. There is no advantage in a formula. They ought to have found a man capable of making peace; he would then have found his own formula, according to his capacity. They ought to have said how peace was to be made; then everybody would have been grateful. As it is we are just where we were, and I should not be surprised if these people in their helplessness also come back to "peace at any price" as their formula as soon as they see that "peace by agreement" does not draw.

One shuts one's eyes because there is nothing but pettiness to look at. Perhaps it is just as well that one can shut them because it becomes intolerable to look on. Perhaps there lies hope in the very fact that the situation seems hopeless.

*July 22, 1917*

A captured English sergeant reports that his countrymen expect to be in Ostend in four weeks. Apart from busy

preparations on the part of the enemy that is all that we know. It is possible that the business will start in a day or two. If our troops knew how much ammunition was piled up yonder, waiting to be used on their bodies, the very idea would probably get on their nerves. It is beginning to feel uncanny. As far as our divisional front is concerned our successful "beach picnic," as the *coup de main* on the Yser Canal is called, has thoroughly upset the English. They keep up an unpleasant bombardment which leaves us no rest day or night, they raid our posts, they open sluices and flood the sectors nearest to them, their cruisers and torpedo-boats tear in and out of Dunkirk Harbour, and their aeroplanes pelt us with bombs; altogether they're behaving like maniacs on the ground, in the water, and in the air, but all that doesn't make us any wiser.

In spite of all this one can lie down on the beach of Ostend and look over the sea to a horizon undisturbed by any smoke or masts, but one feels the atmosphere charged all round about. I cannot say that we ourselves show up very well in all this. The troops at least express their feelings when they grouse; we, on the other hand, are polite enough to talk about duty, which is what we substitute nowadays for the beautiful idea of keenness and enthusiasm, just as turnip-mush has to do instead of raspberry-jelly, and wedlock instead of love. Is it true that one can only do things properly for love? It would be more honourable to say so.

July 25, 1917

So far as we can see the great battle began last night somewhere to the south. Whether our division takes part in it will depend upon whether the enemy succeeds in the centre—that is to say in the direction of Roulers. His hopes of reaching Ostend, of which I have already written, lead one to suppose that the offensive will affect us. Moreover, the English, in addition to all previously known tortures, have been plaguing us recently with a terrible new device, namely, gas bombardments. Even a small quantity, the slightest breath in fact, is sufficient to kill a man—not straight away but by degrees,

sometimes after several hours. Respiration becomes more and more difficult as the lungs fill with liquid instead of with air, and they are eventually drowned, so to speak. It is horrible to watch people who have apparently escaped death succumbing to this gradual suffocation.

This form of intensified torture does not only tell on the front line. Instead of the Higher Command keeping their heads all the clearer their feverish nervousness increases by fantastic degrees. You might almost think it was the madness of Ajax, for it attacks the most responsible. The stream of useless reports, questions, and orders which pours in upon us from above can only be the result of disordered brains. Of course, the troops notice it. The subordinate staffs are tired and depressed, and the whole division is worn out from the rear before it has begun to be attacked by the enemy in front.

*July 27, 1917*

However many new guns we send up—and we do so every night; however many we repair—and we repair them night and day—we cannot keep up to the number which we ought to have. So it is all along the front just now. When once the enemy artillery observer who is directing the fire of his battery has found his mark, there is nothing for our gun to do except wait until it has been smashed up. The observing airman flies quietly about over his victim, protected by the barrage which the enemy air force has set up in the air; he reports by wireless without ceasing: "Short," "Hundred yards right," "O.K.," and even if the battery has time to cover itself up with a smoke-screen the guns stand little chance of escaping. The heavy ones are built in and cannot be removed to fresh positions; none of them can protect itself, for at the second direct hit the gun's crew quite rightly retires into the dug-outs in order not to make a useless bull's-eye for the English. Moreover, everything is so close together that, more often than not there is no room to change position, and when the damaged guns have been brought out through a ceaseless barrage fire under cover of night or smoke,



the drivers are not particularly keen to go out on the following night to the bombarded position to put the new gun in its place. There's a double difficulty. The reserve guns have first to be brought up to the limber positions, and then the horses, drivers, and gun's crews have to be given a chance of getting the piece into the line. How is one to get teams enough, where is one to borrow them? The tracks are all messed up; the horses collapse; the drivers can do no more because they're exhausted; and the gun gets stuck half-way. Perhaps it gets up the next night, perhaps not. On the way to Nieuport I passed a shell-hole, right in the middle of the road, at the bottom of which lay a horse (a second had had its traces cut, and had managed to crawl out); on the top of that lay a field-kitchen upside-down, and over the lot a ration-cart. They had all been pitched into the hole when the shell burst, the nervous horses presumably on top of the rest. God knows when it will all get cleared away, the hole filled, and the road made passable. No work can be done except at night, and the nights are short. All the same, the English offensive is evidently held in check so far on the whole of the Fourth Army front. They have been wanting to let drive for some time, but our artillery is not groggy enough yet. For days the enemy's front-line trenches have been packed with troops; our own form a loose belt in front of the main forces of our defence.

Our men have now been suffering heavy losses every day, and one cannot count on their holding out longer than August 10th without a relief. Then we may get some rest again. It is always the same tale of massacre.

*July 29, 1917*

I am scared. For the first time in this war I have doubts whether we shall be able to hold out against the odds. Thirty new four-gun batteries have appeared on the enemy's front in a single day, not counting those which may not have been spotted; on the Fourth Army front alone there are 160 of those monsters which belch the most enormous shells at us from twenty-five miles away—that is to say, practically out of



range—and that is nothing compared with the total. Altogether there must be eight to ten thousand guns employed on this little bit of front. If one reckons that the main offensive is being made on a front of twenty-five miles, that means a gun to every four yards. Imagine all the ten thousand muzzles hurling out not only projectiles of iron and lead, but spreading poison gases as well; imagine only a fifth of this number of guns opposed to this concentration, all overworked pieces which fire, it is true, but not so accurately as on the first day; imagine an enemy airman cruising over each one of our batteries and directing on to it five times the fire which they can thunder, whereas they are perhaps unsupported by any air forces and simply have to sit tight: that is the picture which scares me. Verdun, the Somme, and Arras are mere purgatories compared with this concentrated hell, which one of these days will be stoked up to white-heat.

The consequence is that, owing to nervousness or over-weariness, or the feel of not being sufficiently strong, we man our forward positions and dug-outs too closely and too soon. That means heavy sacrifices every day, before the battle has really begun, so to speak, for the infantry is already bearing the brunt of the casualties. In particular, the officers at battalion headquarters get caught. The English are aiming at depriving the troops of their leaders, for their airmen have every path and entry photographed; they see the runners disappear into the dug-outs, and a few minutes later down come the shells there just like a note when you strike the tuning-fork. I was watching it yesterday; it makes you grind your teeth with rage and gives you a dry feeling in your throat. I know that I am no pessimist, but I have a sense for coming disaster.

*August 1, 1917*

The units are complaining. Their losses are heavy. They are complaining that they are too heavy to enable them to hold the position when the infantry attack which we are still waiting for begins. All the same, they are not quite right, as I have to prove to them, but regiment and battalion com-

manders lose their nerve and get panicky when they are assailed from the rear with a "paper barrage" (one of Ludendorff's expressions), while the enemy continually plumps heavy bits of iron on the top of the concrete shelters in which they can hardly turn round. The people up above have not enough imagination to picture to themselves what it is like to be plagued in such conditions with memoranda and reports, with trench maps on a scale of almost one in two, and orders as long as your arm. They have to report on every movement which a rifleman makes in his sleep; for every shot which by chance gets fired at the English they get rung up out of their little bit of sleep; for every Tommy whom they capture they have to send in a sketch-map, showing where it happened and reporting (where? when? how? why? what for? what regiment? and God knows what else). Even if this isn't literally true the reality is a good deal worse.

*August 2, 1917*

One man after another goes west. Yesterday we were burying an officer of the 237th Reserve Infantry Regiment, who was under me when we first reconnoitred our way in Flanders, when another one came over and said to me: "Now I am the last of the old crowd."

Incidentally this funeral was the most horrible performance in which I have ever taken part. There were sixty-nine to be buried, including four officers. Detachments from each of their regiments had assembled for the occasion in the new cemetery at Ostend, the most desolate suburban site in the whole world. There hadn't been time to dig out each man his full six feet of earth. Two long trenches, a man's length broad and almost touching one another, had been opened up three feet deep in the right-hand corner, and at the bottom of these the graves had been cut to another three feet, barely a pace being left from one to the other. There they lay, one beside another, just like a bag of game after a day's shooting. Where the two trenches met stood the Protestant chaplain, on a plank laid across them, and uttered offensive platitudes which con-

veyed nothing to those present beside the fact that burying sixty-nine men together was a sad business, only to be properly appreciated if one represented to oneself really and fully the true inwardness of the number sixty-nine; and in order to convey this impression he continually recalled to us the fact that there were sixty-nine of them, adding by way of consolation (for what else could he have meant by it?) that there were more waiting in the mortuary. . . .

As we left the place we promised one another that if any one of us got killed we would not allow any chaplain to speak over his grave. I suppose it was not fair to generalize, but we were too disgusted. When one sees such a minister of God as that one comes to the conclusion that God Almighty intends Christianity to die gradually, like a plant in a pot; otherwise He would not allow it to have such prophets. But I grant you that those two graves were not a pleasant sight, and the minister of God couldn't do anything to help that.

*August 6, 1917*

Yesterday it seemed certain that the relief would take place on the 7th or 8th, but to-day the preliminary orders have not been confirmed. However, we can safely assume that it has only been postponed for twenty-four hours at the most. After that comes my leave.

*To . . .*

FLANDERS, *September 1, 1917*

It was impossible yesterday evening to write you the last farewell I had intended in the smoky and used-up atmosphere of the Cologne waiting-room, in the middle of people, smells, and piles of luggage. Although we left A. punctually, our engine, underfed on bad coal, lost two hours on the way to Cologne. At Cologne, proud in the possession of a portion of pickled pork, I went into the Domhof and had it cooked to make up for the absence of meat on the dinner menu. "A good advertisement for us," said the manager. The price

of the dinner was calculated as if I had ordered the pork there and had it delivered by the hotel with half a pound of caviare into the bargain. On the other hand, I was invited, in the absence even of a paper napkin, to wipe my mouth on the tablecloth. There was neither soap nor towel in the lavatory, the brass taps had been removed, and I suppose that there hadn't been any warm water in the pipes for ever so long.

I arrived here at midday instead of in the morning; but my trunk apparently found even this time too short, for it is hung up somewhere on the way where I can't get at it. In such cases one used to assume that it would come on by the next train; nowadays it makes one anxious, for even in these things one is at the mercy of the almighty god of war. Here I find things just the same. The division is quartered in the neighbourhood, healing the wounds which were dealt it before my leave. My billet is uncomfortable, but somebody sings quietly about the house in a very pretty and thoroughly musical voice. I am afraid of catching sight of the somebody who owns the voice, for I expect her to be pretty and engaging, and probably she does not at all correspond to her voice.

*September 8, 1917*

To-day the division has taken over its old sector, and as the distribution of the troops and staffs is practically the same as last time, it would all be a fairly simple business, provided people would stick to orders and exercise a little common sense. But here one meets with the same extraordinary symptoms as elsewhere. One unit deliberately makes trouble for another by taking down necessary electric fittings, removing furniture and cutting out windows, by stealing the latches off doors because there is a little brass on them, by breaking into greenhouses in order to get a belly-ache on the last night through eating unripe fruit, by carrying off wagons, dogs, and straw which do not belong to it, etc., etc. All these things are not only a nuisance for the new-comer, but make him so tired that he is thankful when he has got everything straight again without further damage.



FLANDERS, *September 10, 1917*

A new line has been opened up for me in addition to the other numerous activities which I have already been forced to describe and threatens to develop. This is "lecturing to the troops." What is meant by that can be seen from a momentous Army order of Ludendorff (I should like to know who drew it up), of which I will set down a few extracts in this diary, in order to preserve them from the files—that grave in which so much that is vital and so much that is trifling lie buried out of sight.

"The attention of Commanding Officers of larger units," runs the order of July 31st, "is drawn to a memorandum to be issued forthwith on the organization of lectures with a view to maintaining the fighting spirit of the army."

It goes on to remark that the *moral* at home is low, and that, granted the existing close ties of the Army with the country, the Army cannot long remain unaffected by it. At home selfishness and a reckless passion for pleasure and profit flourish side by side with croaking, pessimism, and revolution-mongering, which are liable to prejudice the outcome of the war. These phenomena are to be traced partly to real privations, such as shortage of food and fuel, money troubles, the length of the war, loss of relatives, etc., but are partly also the result of deliberate propaganda, unscrupulously carried on by certain elements with the object of using these difficulties to further their political ends and of stirring up class-hatred and discontent of all sorts. The nation is absorbed by humdrum preoccupations, and hardly understands either the greatness and seriousness of the occasion or the sufferings of the Army and the Fleet. It is distracted by profitless discussions instead of bearing the war and its staggering burdens in cheerful unity and in a spirit worthy of its fighting sons.

The order goes on to picture the effects of this feeling in the country on the Army, and proceeds: "This must not be allowed to continue unchecked. It is for the Army to make its fighting spirit felt and thus revive the confidence in victory which the situation entirely justifies. It must constantly foster



and maintain affection for the Kaiser and the reigning princes and the strong German sentiment for the Fatherland, and thus ensure that a fight is put up against all agitators, croakers, and weaklings both at home and at the Front, without at the same time overlooking the trials which the country has to bear. Commanding officers are earnestly requested to give their closest attention to this most vital question. It is emphasized that they have before them a task of far-reaching importance which calls for perseverance as well as tact and circumspection."

For this purpose "lecture officers" are being appointed at Army and Divisional H.Q. I have been selected for my division. I welcome this duty because it gives one insight. It is not easy for commanding officers to gauge the spirit of their troops. The higher ones are especially in the dark. The short question, "How are you getting on?" asked by a General on parade or at casual visits, is invariably answered with an "All right," which does not convey much. The duty is certainly important, particularly so to-day for anyone who means to win the war or who hopes to do so; but if rightly understood it will mean a lot of time for the man who undertakes it, and not very hopeful prospects. He is in the weaker position, for with an Army like ours the influence of the home has all the pull. To get the better of it from the Front is a task which really goes against all the laws of gravity and the circulation. All the opposing forces are so direct in their working; they speak with the intimate voice of a mother, a sister, or a sweetheart. Against these voices we are to raise ours; how pitiful it will sound! Ludendorff's memorandum reminds me of what I once wrote, that wars are won or lost by letters from home.

Our sector of the Front is fairly quiet. The prisoners that we take know nothing of any intention to attack. Every now and then the English bombard Ostend from land and sea, but that wretched old giraffe house, the Kursaal, remains intact.

*September 19, 1917*

Autumn is here. At first one cannot believe it; then all at once it reigns supreme, here as elsewhere. Suddenly one sees that the potato plants are no longer green, that the paths are all covered with leaves, and that the sun shines with an effort. If it were peace-time now I should just be mapping out an autumn ride.

*September 27, 1917*

The clear, moonlit nights, which just now follow the clear days, turn the swarms of enemy airmen into a plague and a danger. Every night they smash up some house or other with their bombs, and the cellar, which used to be the favourite refuge in the old days, is no use now, since the hits all show that one would certainly get buried under the ruins of the collapsed house. None of our own machines appears to protect us; not even a few machine-guns open fire, since there is none available hereabouts. Consequently the enemy does not need to be very daring to come down within a few yards of the ground and cruise about until he is sure of his mark.

It is impossible every now and then even to reach Ostend, because it gets bombarded alternately from land and sea, and it is not worth while risking the little horse and cart for the sake of a bathe, a sole, or a dozen crayfish, not to mention one's own person, although that matters less. The most evident result of the bombardment for the war-time bather from outside the town is that the bathing-women are too scared to look after their bathing-machines, and that there are no fish or crabs because the fishermen won't go out when the English monitors are patrolling the coast. Thereby Ostend loses its last attraction. The deserted promenade, with the row of commonplace villas behind it, is too depressing for words.

I am particularly sad about the loss of all the beautiful positions at Langemarck and Pilkem which my old division captured in April 1915 and which are associated with many little exploits of my men. All that is now in the hands of the English. The oil mill at Roulers is deserted; Sidonie, Febronie,

and Demetria, who used to dispense gin at the corner, have been evacuated; my little old billet has been shot to pieces and the enemy shells now reach right into Roulers. The battle in Flanders is not yet decided, the offensive not even stayed, but the newspapers all talk as if we had already won it.

I've received the cakes. You might think that that's not so important, but it is, for the Staff cook now revels in onions with every dish he serves (otherwise one would not be able to swallow them); the result is that often long after dinner one wants something to dissipate them, but it's not easy to find anything that will settle an onion. I don't need any butter, for I have again trained myself to do without it. I collect my ration and send it to someone at home who is short of it. As a matter of fact food supplies at home seem to be considerably improved. This is confirmed by men who have returned from leave in Wiesbaden and Frankfurt, and no gospel is so welcome as that news nowadays.

WEST FLANDERS, *October 5, 1917*

The "Lectures" have already taken in sail somewhat, and and at least changed their name. They are now known as "Instruction in Duties to the Fatherland." The reason of this transformation are the attacks of the Socialists. There is one thing which they don't realize. If one wants to win the War—and they still want to do that—the *moral* of the troops must be preserved by all reasonable means. These lectures, this "Instruction in Duties to the Fatherland," as we give it, is perfectly reasonable. It speaks well for the farsightedness of the Bavarian Army Command that it had already realized the need in March, long before anybody else had thought of it, and has had very good results in the Bavarian regiments. In course of the discussion on the subject I proposed that a "German Citizen's Handbook" should be written for the Army, in order that each man should know what he had to expect from the State, and my father was asked to write it. Unfortunately here, too, we proved to be short of material; there is no paper to be had for the purpose. That does not

prevent the *Dresdener Generalanzeiger* treating the world to thirty-two pages of print, but for a "Citizen's Handbook" there is no paper to spare. We shall have to find it first.

To . . .

October 9, 1917

You may be right when you say that my letters have an autumnal sound—weary and without any real confidence. It *is* autumn, and the Flemish autumn, with its rainstorms over the monotonous landscape, is not the same as the warm-coloured comforting autumn of the German mountains. It sweeps over devastated country. Weariness, too, is there, because I am bound to get weary at uncongenial work which simply has to be done as a matter of routine in order not to get behindhand with it. If it were only those two things it would not be so bad, for autumn and weariness pass away with the spring and fresh occupations. As to what you say about the absence of confidence, the prospect of the human race at the present time is such a deception that it makes one feel deceived in oneself. After all, one must take the world and the human race seriously; hence they serve to everyone as a sort of mirror, and when one looks into the mass and recognizes oneself among the many fleeting forms, one gets a temporary shock which makes one recoil and shrink into oneself.

It is more or less the same with both of us, and it is better that we should be conscious of the fact than that we should gaze into the mirror with blind eyes, and possess the confidence of the blind who smile even when they have got one foot over the precipice. Moses himself could not alter the face of his people. The trouble with me is that I am not enough of an egoist to realize that it cannot be changed. Moses retired on to the mountain-top. I suppose that really the only genuine confidence is that which one has in oneself, the feeling that at worst one has the strength to save oneself out of the deluge on to a hill-top. Properly speaking one is not entitled to that feeling until one has been through a tremendous struggle, but, in spite of all, I do not think that I have lost it yet.

*October 14, 1917*

Last night, when I came into my quarters, queer thunderstorms were flashing and rolling in wild from the sea. It soon became icy cold, and, all of a sudden, so pitch dark that I had to bring out my pocket-lamp, whereupon the light was so brilliant that it gave me a shock. The autumn weather on the land was fighting with the last waves of warmth from the sea. It was as though the powers of land and sea were battling together—quite uncanny. For a long time I stood looking out into the night. The beasts of the Apocalypse seemed to be at grips there, lashing at one another with hot and cold talons, with icy and glowing breath, with limbs of different shapes and sizes. Probably sea-storms like this are nothing unusual at this time of year, but they are not often so vivid and impressive. Inwardly I was more in the mood for rest and reflection, but these two monsters raged in front of me instead and would not let my senses go.

There is another thing which affects me, too. Round Passchendaele they are fighting hard for farms and hedgerows, all of which I know intimately. It was from there that I wrote my first letters home from the front. I feel myself caught, so to speak, between this battle of the elements and that of men. I could not devote the quiet of the night to calm thoughts, and now one day after another brings me nothing but an eternal blight.

*Same date*

Recently I had occasion to read some extracts from Tolstoy's *Diary*. One of his remarks struck me as unusually shrewd: "Organization," he writes in 1898, "all organizations relieve man of every sort of duty, human, personal, or moral. Therein lies the root of all the evil in the world. Men are beaten to death, demoralized, degraded, and nobody bears the responsibility."

My present employment is like a hydra—the more I do the more demands rear up their hissing heads at me. The movement of officers has increased so extraordinarily that we can hardly



make both ends meet in this respect. They nearly all go down on grounds of health; as soon as the bombardment begins to get hot some appendicitis, or heart trouble, or sciatica begins to worry them, which is always dormant when there is no shooting on.

WEST FLANDERS, *October 18, 1917*

What is going to happen? According to the reports of reliable agents the English Fleet is waiting with full steam up. This can only mean an attack on the Flanders coast, but to my mind such a move could have no sense unless Haig actually breaks through at Roulers. Are the English so confident? I cannot believe in a break-through, for although the battle rages constantly in incomprehensible confusion round Poelcappelle and Passchendaele, there is nothing frightening about that. At such points in the main attack all communications invariably break down; every position is packed with troops; and those in front have no idea what is going on until they come to a standstill, not even the officers commanding. It is the same on both sides. The danger here lies in the ridiculous behaviour of many divisional staffs, which, in order to save their troops from being used up, think of nothing else than how soon they can get out of the hell. That entails withdrawals and reliefs, all of which mean waste of lives and material. The troops are being used up at a disquieting rate. Everybody is best pleased if his spell is over as soon as possible. General von Lossberg, however, who is in command of the defensive operations, has not got an unlimited supply of divisions; not many people seem to realize that.

For the last few days there has been nothing much doing on our divisional front except the usual artillery duel. We have been fighting the last summer flies, which attack one so unkindly, almost as much as the English. The *moral* of the men appears to be excellent and is generally considered to be so. If every now and then some officer did not complain that he had still not got this or that decoration, and make a great fuss and pother over it; if every now and then some private

did not grouse about the pea-soup of his mess being burnt, one might imagine that everything was for the very best. But the very paltriness of these demands and complaints proves how little spirit and determination yet remains, not to speak of such a quality as dash. The good *moral* is very superficial and is the consequence of slight losses, comfortable quarters, and the doubtful pleasures of Ostend and Bruges, where the troops can buy their bad beer and cigars and enjoy paying heavily for them after the manner of the rich; in addition they can listen to a bad gramophone, or one of those mechanical organs, such as one always finds in the street-corner taverns of England and Belgium.

All the same, a man is doing his job here in defending his country; the same cannot be said of his elected representatives in the Reichstag. These gentry have never realized that it will have to fare much worse with Germany before she gives in. As if they had to stick it as we do! Surely it is for the soldiers at the Front to decide. There seems to be no lesson or warning for them in the prospect which faced Frederick the Great after the battle of Kollin, or in the condition to which Prussia was reduced after the Treaty of Tilsit. Everyone must admit that the behaviour of our Parliament does not inspire confidence; "parliamentary" and "undisciplined" have become synonyms. Nobody seems to trouble any more about all this hooting, booing, and interruption, all this scrapping and caterwauling. It is high time that the frogs were given a block of wood to rule over them.

If one casts one's eyes from the Front, where there is certainly not much enthusiasm these days, back homewards, they meet a very pitiful sight. Many men will ask themselves whether there is any sense in going back, and some will envy those who have no home to go to. The only consolation to be derived from the prospect lies in the thought that all the screaming in Parliament and between the parties is quite a superficial phenomenon, since all that is best, youngest, and strongest in the country is at the Front.

After all, we are still better off than the Russians, with their

mutinous Fleet, a disintegrating Army, and bandits systematically robbing the railway trains. They are in vain struggling to revive forces which no longer exist. Think of a man who felt the power in him to say to the dead, "Arise!" He speaks the word, and the dead do not arise. Even Christ Himself could not have stood that.

VARSENAERE, *October 23, 1917*

The division has been relieved. Presumably it is destined to be put in again at the warmest spot after a fairly brief rest: the usual trouble. I find myself now at exactly the same spot where I was in August of last year, just before I left the Western Front to go to Galicia.

*To . . .*

WEST FLANDERS, *October 25, 1917*

For the time being we are again having a heavy time without any support. Outside the autumn storms are blowing the leaves from the trees once and for all, while inside we freeze in front of the Belgian fireplaces because no German understands them. He sets aside no wood to dry, and out of ignorance declares these agreeable companions for a winter evening to be entirely useless. We are quartered in the middle of a wonderfully laid-out park in a château of refined hideousness, perpetrated in 1877-80 by a German architect, as an inscription reveals to us. There are thousands of bottles of first-class wine in the cellars—still there, but the Army in its wisdom has requisitioned them and distributes them to the troops, who would be just as happy with a stiff brandy or a glass of beer, whereas we are allowed to pay five marks in the canteens for a concoction of whortleberry juice. I do not grudge the troops their drink, but at the same time we have none.

The beautiful greenhouses, which were full of lovely fruit, grapes, and peaches last year, when I left the district, are now broken and empty, thanks to the efforts of various divisions which have been busy here. Now that the division is resting

the discussion about whether the night has been quiet or not, how many shells were fired at this or that battery, and where from, etc., has dried up, and there is nothing left to talk about. After dinner a sociably inclined lieutenant of signals plays one or two pieces for violin and piano with the G.S.O.2. The signaller scrapes away with vigour and *empressement*, while the G.S.O. goes in for constant use of the pedals. The whole sounds rather like a bull in a china-shop. His Excellency considers a certain "Serenade for Kubelik" particularly beautiful—the composer, as usual, counts for nothing. Thereby the rubbish has been officially licensed and is dispensed to us plentifully. Fortunately, a dog sometimes saves the situation by howling in the middle.

Toasts are being drunk in Constantinople, while on the Aisne lots of guns are being blown up and abandoned to the enemy. All that doesn't chime, and it is impossible not to feel that there is good reason for being uneasy.

*November 2, 1917*

It still remains to be seen whether the enemy has given up his great scheme of landing troops on the coast simultaneously with a big offensive at Passchendaele because he does not feel strong enough. For the time being we are still expecting an attack, and Bruges and the surrounding country are stiff with troops. Spirits are fairly high; the men are so far still happy. From all the officers who give "Instruction in Duties to the Fatherland" I hear tales of the excellent *moral* of the troops. But a blind man is always cheerful. Nobody can possibly calculate what he or we have got to face. You have only got to consider what three years of war did for Russia (I don't mean the Revolution alone); even though the effects will not be quite the same with us, they are bound to tend in the same direction, namely, of demoralization and disintegration.

*November 7, 1917*

In the next few days we are leaving this château, and for the immediate future shall have to get used to less comfortable

quarters. We are going into the line to the south in front of Roulers, country which I know quite well. There are hardly any billets left there, and those which still survive will be stuck to by the troops which are already there. In many places, which in 1915 were used to quarter a single squadron, now regiments, staffs, and details lie so thick that even the lice in the seams of your shirt are cramped for room.

The gradual withdrawal from the Ypres salient has been delayed with real art, but it will still have to keep on being a retirement. The odds against us are too big. You can realize what it means to have three times as many guns and five times as much ammunition against us when I tell you that in the course of October alone the Fourth Army had to return 2,100 guns as useless, either shot to bits, buried, or completely destroyed.

*To . . .*

WEST FLANDERS, *November 11, 1917*

I made use of the time during which the Division was moving from the quiet park of Varsenaere into the battle zone to attend a conference of "Instruction in Duties to the Fatherland" officers which happened to be held in Ghent. I knew that in this phase of the war, when the iron-tired motor-lorries, wagons, and horses can hardly move on the roads, when the trains go no faster than a walking pace, when all the tracks are jammed with transport and troops moving up and down, a division would need time to complete even this comparatively small move. So I could get away. When I arrived this evening in the neighbourhood of Roulers and looked for the division, everything in my department, both men and material, was still somewhere on the way between Bruges and its destination; only my horses had arrived. The evening was unusually quiet, the enemy either exhausted or else short of ammunition, and the muddy roads were only occasionally lit up by the flash of gunfire. I felt my way as best I could in the darkness, past ghostly transport lines, to a strange house and a strange bed, where I spent the last hours of the night under my cloak in my boots and trousers. I was not a little surprised when I found in



the morning that everything was changed, and that I was in the well-known manse in which R.-T. used to live when he was still battalion-commander. In those days his battalion was quartered here alone; the hamlet was quiet, clean, and peaceful. To-day there are two divisional staffs, transport columns, bakeries, ration-dumps, and God knows what else all on top of one another and jealous of one another's space. In the market-place there stands, like a herd of elephants rounded up, a mass of lorries, splashed and plastered with mud up to the springs and sagging askew almost down to their axles. The movement of carts, horses, tramways, motor-cars, motor-cycles, and boots, all stamping, clattering, hooting, snorting, and pushing along the same street, deafens one's senses like a blast from hell. Arras and the Somme were nothing to this. All the same, one still has the impression that some sort of invisible order is being preserved in the whole mess—not, of course, as if everything were being done with the least possible expenditure of effort, but rather as if the engine were running its poor best with its furnace stoked to the utmost on its last bit of coal.

Our agents say that the English are preparing another superhuman effort, but however much ammunition and artillery the enemy employs he cannot achieve more than simply make our first zone of defence untenable. He cannot advance more than 500 yards in one thrust unless something goes quite wrong with us, and for the next thrust he needs more time.

WEST FLANDERS, *November 14, 1917*

It is appalling up at the Front. I have just come back from a visit to our best regiment, which is holding a position I know well to the north of Passchendaele and has had heavy losses in the very first days. It is right in the mud, without any protection, without a single decent dug-out, for in this rapid withdrawal there is no time to dig. How many of those fellows who a fortnight ago were cheerfully celebrating the glorious record of their regiment will never laugh again; even the

others who can laugh again do not laugh for long. "My fellows are in tears," reports one battalion-commander in despair, whose whole battalion lay covered by a regular blanket of English shells. Many of the men can hardly speak. You see wild eyes gazing out of faces which are no longer human. They have a craving after brandy which can hardly be satisfied, and which shows how badly they yearn to lose the faculty for feeling. Men drink it who have never touched it before as though by instinct. Although nothing very much in the way of bombardment was being vouchsafed us, I found myself practically the only one going towards the Front; I saw nothing but men coming back. Only field-kitchens and stretcher-bearers—that is to say, people whose nerves are fed from the rear—were making their way forwards. Scores of men were streaming to the rear, one by one but without stopping, all in need of rest; not malingerers—no doubt merely men who need one day or two to come to themselves again. It is a perfectly honourable demand to make, but while the company-commanders are forced to send first one and then another, and then a third to the rear because they are no use in the line, the battalion-commander or the regimental-commander is always calling out for more men to defend a position which is in danger, or to meet an expected attack.

One sees much magnificent conduct calmly and coolly shown in the middle of much which is less admirable and weaker. That type of man makes allowances for the others by increasing his own efforts. A battalion-commander, Freiherr von G., stuck to his battalion for two days with a splinter of shell in his lung. He remained simply as an example; he knew it; and such examples have an effect. One cannot say that the *moral* is low or weak. The regiments simply show a sort of staggering and faltering, as people do who have made unheard-of efforts.

I simply cannot describe the appearance of this country, which in 1915 and 1916 flourished in spite of the War because there was so much sap and vigour left in it. The town of Roulers in particular gives you an impression of unutterable

sadness. The greater part of the inhabitants fled during a bombardment, which did not, as a matter of fact, do much damage. Wherever they left the houses were plundered. Wherever the windows and shutters were not shattered by the bursting of the great shells they were senselessly smashed in by the soldiers, and many, many rooms which might later have served as billets were ruined for this purpose. Generally speaking there was nothing of any use or value left in the locked-up shops, but the men had to steal and smash and plunder and defile. It does not occur to any of them that next week his comrades will have no shelter; to-day any of them will smash up a house in search of a half-bottle of brandy, which he is already more or less convinced that he won't find. So it is in everything. A man breaks down a whole barn to get a bundle of straw, a whole house to get a load of wood, ruins a wine-cellar for the sake of a bottle of wine and a château for the sake of one night's sleep.

WEST FLANDERS, *November 16, 1917*

Russia in these days presents a spectacle which repeats itself again and again. A mob is always arrogant. It seizes power without the slightest consideration, but also without the slightest capacity to exercise it. Again and again on these occasions it lays claim to this capacity, but in nearly every case it fails. They always want to behave at once in the grand manner, just in the old style. An inaugural banquet of these new rulers in the city banqueting-hall must be a priceless sight. Tuppenny-halfpenny lawyers, barristers, and swindlers of all descriptions are the leaders, and ignorance, conceit, and megalomania sit at table together. I have always found these episodes of history as significant as the story of Circe transforming men into swine. It is a wonderful symbol of what human beings can come to. Once upon a time I had an idea of writing a play on this theme. I imagined a scene in which the swine were sitting at table together in Circe's palace. Why on earth do these thoughts come back to me?

*Same date*

I do not wish to forget a wonderful letter which I have just received. The man who wrote it is chaplain to one of our hospitals. He was looking for the regiment of his only son who had been killed a few days ago on this front. His grave is already behind the English lines. The father writes how, out of pride in this son of his, he is going to preach in his parish at home on this great experience. I should like to hear that sermon, although sermons are not things which I usually run after. I found this man just after he had received news of his son's death; he wanted to reach his regiment, the spot where he had fallen, and needed a few days' leave. That was what brought him to me. As he spoke to me about his boy his face lit up under his tears. To have experienced this grief seemed to him a marvellous achievement. He was proud to have been so rich that so much could be taken from him.

*November 1917*

The English have not attacked again for the last few days. To-day our regiments are being withdrawn for six days from their so-called positions; then I suppose they will spend a few more relieving others in the thick of it. But I have a feeling that Tommy over yonder has lost some of his keenness. According to prisoners our new howitzers are doing their duty.

*November 22, 1917*

We are right off the track; everywhere there is illusion, which amounts to the same thing. When once a war is begun both sides always feel equally justified, for when once the two opponents have entered the battle they have got to go on with it. Neither of them can say: "I am not going to fight; you go on with the War by yourself." So they both go on fighting for their rights, each under the illusion, but also with the firm conviction that their rights are better than the other's. Every individual suffers from the same illusion, and is bound to suffer from it if he is to be of any use in the struggle. But

even those few who have the courage to look again and who wipe their eyes in order to drive away the fog and dispel the illusion, even they have got off the track like the rest. Even those with eyes to see become blind when they too are swept along to their fate. Instead of trusting their own feelings they share the feelings of their comrades, and speak of Right as they do, of *Kultur* as they do, of Freedom as they do, and of Honour as they do. What nonsense it is! I would rather be punished than fight for what people round about me call *Kultur*, but one is far from possessing one's own will. One does not seem true to oneself, nor is one. Instead of fighting for oneself as one "battling for his rights" one fights for others, and for the rights of a generality, of the existence of which one can only be convinced so long as one does not reflect.

How satisfactory was the medieval notion that the victor justified his innocence, his rights, his claim to his throne, his wife, or his kingdom simply through his victory. In those days it would never have occurred to anyone in the course of a battle or a campaign to try and convince the world that he was in the right. That was proved only by the victory. Those men were more honourable than we. Even though a duel proves nothing according to modern ideas of right, the duellist who has any sense of his own worth will still say to himself: "The other man has his rights too; which of us has the better rights nobody can tell." If we could feel like that on both sides we should be a long way nearer to peace and the right track. Then one would have enough of this sort of fighting, which brings no decision.

Flourishing nations have been so exhausted by war in the past that their prosperity has ceased for ever, and their sap dried up. The notion that your enemy has his rights, and that no one knows whether his are better than yours, would, of course, not do away with war, but it would make it only possible in campaigns of short duration, in which third parties could not and would not wish to take part, for they, too, would argue in the same way. Thus great devastation would be



avoided. If the stronger gains the victory, that is one of Nature's laws, which gives the advantage to the stronger, it is true, but which the world has tolerated long enough without cutting itself to pieces, and to the general satisfaction of men. The notion that the other man has his rights, and that no one knows which are the better, is a manly one; the other notion, that I only have rights, or that one nation alone has rights, is childish. Naturally this point of view will be dubbed unpatriotic, but it is perfectly natural that any point of view higher than that which is held by the rest of the world to-day should be unpatriotic.

*Same date*

Whether one sits up to the waist in a slimy shell-hole, or in a wooden hut, or in a worn-out village billet with oleographs and little painted plaster-of-Paris figures of the Virgin on the wall, it's all the same: one gets used up. As it is the same with everybody, the company which one affords to anybody else becomes just as bad as that which one obtains oneself from him. Lethargy wins hands down. The field-library is quite good; there is the theatre in Bruges; but the desire to see Lucie Höflich as Gretchen is, in the present circumstances, absurd, and the impression produced by good books is very much reduced by the further impression that they are something entirely alien to you.

I often imagine to myself how Frederick the Great must have felt after seven years of war. He always says himself how much the last years affected him. Even men like General von Lossberg, who is made of iron if ever a man was, show how rapidly exhaustion comes. He looks grey and old, and yet only last month I saw him full of vigour.

And then again there comes the quite extraordinary counter-sensation—that one would not wish to lose any of these years out of one's life; that one would not wish to have spent this time, or even part of this time, on a happy island; that one hopes to win something by the very length of one's endurance; that one is prepared to suffer even worse, even more revolting

things : all this out of obstinacy, out of a lust for things which lead one to extremes. It seems as if in all this there lay something positive, some gain, some worth, some change for the better !

*November 25, 1917*

Just at my corner the road comes up to the level of the window (I should say that it isn't a window but merely a hole with boards nailed over it). The noise of the tramway, of the transport, the lorries, the horses' hooves, the nailed boots, the shouting and pushing and snorting, makes sleep quite impossible. Between midnight and 3 a.m. it gets a bit quieter, but about 3 o'clock the din begins again in the other direction. No sooner is the tramway by, with its shrill clatter and clang, than one's awakened senses begin to listen for the motor-transport column. Six-and-twenty times in succession the house shakes to equal waves of vibration. Then come the wagons. The tramway carries ammunition, the lorries carry ammunition, the wagons carry ammunition. This idea, night after night, has something unspeakably distressful about it which prevents one's sleeping, for even when the din is by the idea remains.

*To . . .*

*LICHTERVELDE (WEST FLANDERS), December 16, 1917*

The division is once again out at rest for the time being, but already mighty preparations are being made for the spring. Everybody understands that "spring" means "offensive," and everything derives fresh activity from this thought. Our quarters are the worst, dirtiest, and most poverty-stricken that we have ever had. I am sitting in my Galician sheepskin in front of a bare board which is my work-table. The so-called bed is a smelly up-and-down of seaweed, which can be (so to speak) located by a sheet of paper which represents the bedside mat. An acetylene lamp emits a gentle odour of garlic which joins successfully in the competition of the other smells. The washing-water is black with the coal-dust spread all over

the room by the little stove, which claims the right of not heating in return for this blessing. The heavy guns thunder backwards and forwards from the Front, the lorries and transport rattle and drone, just as they did in the last village. Only the tramway is missing.

*To . . .*

*December 25, 1917*

I was so tired and seedy when I wrote you my last two letters that I was almost afraid that you must have noticed it. It seemed as if none of the love which I wanted to express would come, almost as if it could not be really true. I was terribly worn out with fever and noise. To-day I am better. I must have been fairly run down physically. At any rate, I ate yesterday evening like a beggar, and all the wines which had been collected and served up for Christmas Eve tasted good, although I knew perfectly well how second-rate they were. My body sucked them up with a sort of voracity over which I had no control. It gets hold of you like that in sickness and does you good. Finally I fell into a deep sleep, and woke up to-day in a condition which I welcome as sound.

"So it's to be in the spring," you write about the War. Is that already the feeling in the country, or is it only your own? Here one has only one thought—in the spring—and everyone feels convinced. Everyone feels that a damnable thorn has been removed from the flesh since Russia has opened peace negotiations.

*NEW YEAR'S EVE, 1917*

So to-day we speed the parting year and welcome a new one to-morrow. The world is crying out just as busily for peace as it is arming itself to carry on the War. Both sides are no doubt quite genuine with their outcry. We should find it most extraordinary of all to except ourselves, since we are longing not only for peace but also for the great victory in the West. Yes, no peace in the East at any price without victory in the West. There is nobody with sound senses who does not

catch himself thinking that. If our military situation were worse we should think otherwise, but people talk now of Calais, Amiens, and Paris as they did in the first months of the War, and at the same time they speak of peace as of a fact which will happen as surely as the beginning of spring or the solstice.

New Year's wishes! New Year's hopes! They have an almost amiable appearance. But I don't believe in any of it. We shall never have peace with England and America so long as they do not need to make it, and they do not need to yet.

January 12, 1918

The Supreme Army Command has asked the officers in charge of "Instruction in Duties to the Fatherland" for a report on the effect of the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations on the *moral* of the troops. Exhaustive investigations for this purpose were made by myself and my subordinates. I set down the report compiled from my own observations and from the investigations among the rank and file just as it was sent in to Fourth Army Headquarters.

"The Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations have beyond question had an inspiring effect on the troops. The very fact that peace negotiations are in progress fills them with hope and expectation. These hopes are exclusively set on the conclusion of peace—with Russia first, and with the Western Powers possibly, or probably, after a successful offensive. They are so set upon peace that a breakdown of the negotiations in the East would produce a very appreciable depression. The conditions for peace in the East, as set forth and propounded by our delegates, appear to the men more practical and comprehensible than the general formula of 'no annexation, no indemnities,' and self-determination. No misgivings are felt about the conditions of peace. Units which are some distance from the front line seem inclined to favour bigger claims than their comrades who are in touch with the enemy. The attitude of the men towards our delegates in the negotiations with Russia is one of great confidence and patient expectation. They are satisfied that the Supreme Army Com-

mand, which represents the only certain backing on which the rank and file can rely in all things, has made sure of exercising a sufficient influence on the peace conditions.

"All formations, particularly those largely composed of elder men, are opposed to any German demands which are likely to impede or delay the conclusion of peace.

"With few exceptions the men do not take up a very critical attitude towards the negotiations. As reported above, they have general confidence in the Supreme Army Command. In many cases active officers and N.C.O.'s consider that the formula of 'no annexation, no indemnities,' is unsatisfactory and inadequate in view of the dearly bought successes which they consider have been obtained. In spite of this it is fully realized that no annexation in the East is necessary or advisable, and that the peace ought properly to bear the aspect which is proposed. As for a definite peace in the West, an offensive is not only expected, but considered necessary as the best means of achieving it. Everybody is convinced both of its imminence and of its success. Now that their backs are covered, the reliance and confidence of the troops in this respect is unbounded. In no cases, however, do they regard it as a means of obtaining a favourable peace, but simply as a way to bring matters to a conclusion."

*January 13, 1918*

Army Headquarters have just telephoned to me that they are forwarding my report in the original to the Supreme Army Command.

WEST FLANDERS, *January 13, 1918*

Our little Excellency, the General ("Het Exzellenzje," as I have christened him in Flemish), is certainly one of the bravest in face of the enemy. Nothing can disturb his calm, which makes this hero's nervousness of other things all the more amusing. Just at present he is on leave in Munich.



His distaste for this town is enough to make you laugh. It contains theatres, famous buildings, artists, monuments, palaces, pictures, and galleries, all of which call for some appreciation, whereas they mean practically nothing to him. He wriggled like an eel to get out of going there. It is clear that he regards associations of this sort as an effort for him, and he considers them particularly from a distance, as a greater hardship to endure than weeks of war on the Flanders front. He went off with very mixed feelings, and secret regrets for his afternoon game of patience, his evening of cards (when the circumstances permit), and his usual army rations, which he likes simple—all of which he will have to give up in the Hotel Leinfelder at Munich. That is what I like about this man.

*February 12, 1918*

I reckon that for the future the War will simply go to pieces, hastened possibly by some tremendous cataclysm. All the same, I have a much better feeling and hopes about our new venture (I don't really know anything, but simply draw my conclusions) than I had about our undertaking at Verdun. Everything which is being done now is on a sound basis. I must not say more, nor yet less, than that.

There is any amount to do—very absorbing things. Naturally it is impossible so far for any of us to know whether, or to what extent, we are taking part in any particular operation, and even when we know we may not say. Everything which one hears from other quarters is mere rumour. The peace with Russia no longer excites any enthusiasm, even now that it is an accomplished fact. Not a single bottle of wine was drunk to celebrate it. All the same, the fact that everything which Russia represented is no longer at war with us is the most important event which has happened to us since the outbreak of war. But we have got no joy-peals left in us; people seem to have left them behind with some other part of their being. And then, now come the Americans.

March 4, 1918

So my father is really off to the Headquarters of the Eleventh Army in Macedonia to deliver lectures. To boast seventy-seven years of age and to carry them so debonairly is a fine thing.

KORTRYK, March 7, 1918

Busy with preparations. Field-post suspended. The division moving.

BEFORE THE OFFENSIVE, March 20, 1918

I hardly know how to write—I have had to keep silence so long—but to-morrow, they say, the field-post will start again. To-morrow there will be nothing to keep secret, for then hell breaks loose. Before the letters go to the rear, which will be in a few hours, I want just to come to you in these lines. Of course, I know that I cannot entirely escape the day which is so relentlessly approaching. It is a tremendous thing for every one of us. Æschylus says that a drama ought to excite Hope and Fear, but here is one already showing behind the curtain and awakening both of these sensations before it even rises. It will be a drama like a Greek tragedy, with a fate hanging over it, shaped and created by man alone, and ready to descend on the head of him who is responsible.

The preparations are quite inconceivable in detail, and can only be described as the last word. The troops are packed in position so tight that those in front have been there for the last ten days. For weeks past ammunition has been hauled and hauled, night after night, to be piled in mountains round the guns. All that is to be poured out on the enemy in four hours from now. One division lies behind another to an incalculable depth, and three armies, the 18th, the 2nd, and the 17th, are to attack together in unison on an infinitesimal front. So far as possible the troops will advance over ground which they know from the Somme battles. Our own objective is the area where we lay in January and February of last year. The attack will be delivered over the territory which we laid waste, and where there are neither roads, trees, nor villages.

We belong to the second wave. It is impossible as yet to say whether this will have the easier task or the first. Since March 1st the horses have been getting a ration of 10 lb. of oats, and all the attacking divisions have been provided with first-class remounts from the Quartermaster-General's reserve. God knows how Ludendorff has got them together. I am still 200 short for the Division, but they are to be given me when we advance, or during the battle. Naturally the railways have been working day and night at this business; waiting for thousands of trains with men, horses, guns, wagons, ammunition, tools, rations, bridging material, and a hundred other things was a trying business for everybody.

We are all going as light as possible. All unnecessary baggage has been ruthlessly prohibited; we all left it willingly behind, buoyed up by a final hope. The organization is really great, but it was, of course, impossible to keep the secret. In Brussels every child knows that the offensive is to begin on March 21st.

VILLERS OUTRÉAUX, *March 21, 1918*

I have just come across the first English prisoners, companies of English and Irish regiments of different divisions. They are all magnificently equipped with leather jerkins, good puttees, and excellent boots. An awfully good-looking young English captain is just waiting, with a smiling, interested face, for me to speak to him; so I do. It appears they had been expecting the attack for the past twenty days, but did not expect it to-day; the preliminary bombardment by our guns seemed to him much too mild for that!!! Although the English reserves were very close up, they could not be used owing to the fog and the quickness of our infantry. This officer wore the most wonderful riding-boots. When I looked him up and down he apologized for not being properly dressed for marching. He said he had just been going for a ride. He appeared to take it rather amiss that our attack had not left him time to dress himself in proper style with boots and puttees to be taken prisoner.

*March 22, 1918*

Here I am in the middle of generals, horses, orderlies, dead, and wounded. Yesterday's attack would have completely succeeded had not the gas-cloud from our own guns lain too long on the ground. The infantry could not get forward through this poison barrier.

ST-EMILIE, NEAR EPÉHY, *March 23, 1918*

We are going like hell, on and on, day and night. The sun and moon help. One or two hours' halt, then on again. Our baggage is somewhere in the rear, and nobody expects to see it again. We are glad if ration-carts and field-kitchens can get up to us at night; then men and horses feed for the next twenty-four hours at one sitting. To-day this happened at 7 a.m. Then the ration-carts disappear again until further notice.

We have reached the zone in which all the wells and streams have been wrecked, and the water for the attacking troops has to be brought up in water-carts. That applies to the men. The horses have got to wait until we cross the canal at Moislains-Nurlu; we are supposed to reach it to-day.

Spent the night on the bare floor of an English dug-out, with the G.O.C. Artillery and his officers. Now we go forward, past craters and trenches, captured gun-positions, ration-dumps, and clothing-depots. Another wonderful spring day with an early mist, which helps us. Our cars now run on the best English rubber tyres, we smoke none but English cigarettes, and plaster our boots with lovely English boot-polish—all unheard-of things which belong to a fairyland of long ago. There are limits to personal cleanliness. Comfort consists in a horse-bucket full of very doubtful water out of a shell-hole, but one treats it as if it came straight from the springs of Baden-Baden, so glad is one's skin to be refreshed. We assume that it will be at least eight days before we are under a roof again. The devastation is immeasurable. There is hardly a cellar left of the villages which we destroyed and over which the unexpected attack now rages. Of course, the really hard part will begin when we get on beyond.

CRATER-FIELD, NEAR LE FOREST, *March 26, 1918*

There was the corner of a little wood where the English put up a desperate resistance, apparently with a few machine-guns, and finally with only one. When the defence was broken down, out from the lines of our advancing infantry, which I was following, appeared an English General, accompanied by a single officer. He was an extraordinary sight. About thirty-five years old, excellently—one can almost say wonderfully—dressed and equipped, he looked as if he had just stepped out of a Turkish bath in Jermyn Street. Brushed and shaved, with his short khaki overcoat on his arm, in breeches of the best cut and magnificent high lace-boots, such as only the English bootmakers make to order, he came to meet me easily and without the slightest embarrassment. The sight of all this English cloth and leather made me more conscious than ever of the shortcomings of my own outfit, and I felt an inward temptation to call out to him, "Kindly undress at once," for a desire for an English General's equipment, with tunic, breeches, and boots, had arisen in me, shameless and patent.

I said, "Good morning," and he came to a stop with his companion. By way of being polite, I said with intention: "You have given us a lot of trouble; you stuck it for a long time." To which he replied: "Trouble! Why, we have been running for five days and five nights!" It appeared that when he could no longer get his brigade to stand he had taken charge of a machine-gun himself, to set an example to his retreating men. All his officers except the one with him had been killed or wounded, and his brigade hopelessly cut up. I asked for his name, to remind me of our meeting, and he gave it. He was General Dawson, an Equerry of the King.

We have now spent two nights in the crater-field of the old Somme battle. No desert of salt is more desolate. Last night we slept in a hole in the crumbly, chalky soil, and froze properly. It is impossible to sleep for excitement. Really one would like to be after them day and night, and only longs that there shall be no rest until one can feel the first breath of the Atlantic in Amiens. To-morrow we hope to be on a level



with Albert, where there will be villages again. Here the villages are merely names. Even the ruins are ruined. Yesterday I was looking for Bouchavesnes, which used to be quite a large place. There was nothing but a board nailed to a low post with the inscription in English, "This was Bouchavesnes."

MEAUX, TO THE SOUTH OF ALBERT, *March 27, 1918*

We are through at last, through the awful crater-field of the Somme. After twenty-five miles of unbroken waste the first house, ruined though it was, was saluted like a vision from the Promised Land. Our troops passed to the south of Albert. Now we are already in the English back areas, or at least rest-areas, a land flowing with milk and honey. Marvellous people these, who will only equip themselves with the very best that the earth produces. Our men are hardly to be distinguished from English soldiers. Every one wears at least a leather jerkin, a waterproof either short or long, English boots or some other beautiful thing. The horses are feasting on masses of oats and gorgeous food-cake. The inhabitants deliver up chickens and pigeons with the usual tears. Cows, calves, and pigs find their way unobtrusively out of their farmyards into the field-kitchens, and there is no doubt the army is looting with some zest.

Yesterday evening we witnessed the wonderful spectacle of the English blowing up all the munition-dumps in this area, and there were not a few. Millions of shells will have no further chance of being fired at us.

If we had not had this weather we should not be nearly so far as we are. To push the enemy through twenty-five miles of desert at the most unlikely spot of all, with horse, foot and artillery, rations and ammunition, that was a conception worthy of a leader. Fighting by day, movement without stopping by night of troops and transport, along ten roads simultaneously. Like the wandering of a people, like a sea of tailless serpents moving their heads all level before them, so was this advance.

To-day I was mildly hit, so mildly that it only raised a weal. A rifle bullet went through two coats which I was wearing in the early morning on account of the cold and struck my thigh like a blow from a hammer. I was wearing a pair of riding-breeches of English cloth, against which the English bullet stopped respectfully and fell to earth. I picked it up almost like a friendly greeting and stuck it in the pocket of the breeches which it had failed to pierce.

*March 28, 1918*

Everything is still a tremendous strain for us all. For eight days we have not been able to take off our clothes and boots. Often there is no water even for washing, let alone drinking. All that is available is the icy-cold water of the shell-holes, quite clear above the green scum at the bottom. We first take a mouthful each to drink, and then use it successively for cleaning our teeth, then for moistening our shaving-brushes, and finally for washing.

*Same date*

To-day the advance of our infantry suddenly stopped near Albert. Nobody could understand why. Our airmen had reported no enemy between Albert and Amiens. The enemy's guns were only firing now and again on the very edge of affairs. Our way seemed entirely clear. I jumped into a car with orders to find out what was causing the stoppage in front. Our division was right in front of the advance, and could not possibly be tired out. It was quite fresh. When I asked the Brigade Commander on the far side of Meaux why there was no movement forward he shrugged his shoulders and said he did not know either; for some reason the divisions which had been pushed on through Albert on our right flank were not advancing, and he supposed that this was what had caused the check. I turned round at once and took a sharp turn with the car into Albert.

As soon as I got near the town I began to see curious sights. Strange figures, which looked very little like soldiers, and

certainly showed no sign of advancing, were making their way back out of the town. There were men driving cows before them on a line; others who carried a hen under one arm and a box of notepaper under the other. Men carrying a bottle of wine under their arm and another one open in their hand. Men who had torn a silk drawing-room curtain from off its rod and were dragging it to the rear as a useful bit of loot. More men with writing-paper and coloured note-books. Evidently they had found it desirable to sack a stationer's shop. Men dressed up in comic disguise. Men with top-hats on their heads. Men staggering. Men who could hardly walk.

They were mostly troops from one of the Marine divisions. When I got into the town the streets were running with wine. Out of a cellar came a lieutenant of the Second Marine Division, helpless and in despair. I asked him, "What is going to happen?" It was essential for them to get forward immediately. He replied, solemnly and emphatically, "I cannot get my men out of this cellar without bloodshed." When I insisted, assuming from my white dragoon facings that I belonged to the same division as himself, he invited me to try my hand, but it was no business of mine, and I saw, too, that I could have done no more than he.

I drove back to Divisional H.Q. with a fearful impression of the situation. The advance was held up, and there was no means of setting it going again for hours. When I considered what was happening up in front it seemed to me to be merely a magnified expression of the passion and craving which we were all experiencing. Had not I seen yesterday an officer younger than myself sitting beside me in the car suddenly call out to the driver to stop at once, without so much as asking my leave. When I asked him in astonishment what he meant by stopping the car when we were on an urgent mission, he answered, "I must just pick up that English waterproof lying beside the road." The car stopped. He jumped out, seized an English waterproof which lay on the bank, and then jumped joyfully back again, as if refreshed and waked to new life.

If this lack of restraint seized an officer like that, one can

imagine what effect it must have on the private soldier to have craved and hungered and thirsted for months on end. Where in the case of the officer it was the waterproof which tempted him so irresistibly as to make him forget his most important duties, with the private soldiers, according to taste, it was the coloured picture-postcard, the silk curtain, the bottle of wine, the chicken, or the cow, but in most cases the wine.

ENGLISH ARTILLERY REPAIR-SHOPS, NEAR PROYART, ON THE  
HIGH ROAD TO AMIENS, *March 29, 1918*

We are searching for the weakest spot. As yesterday the advance was stopped at Albert while the Eighteenth Army to our left thrust forward as far as Montdidier, our division is being withdrawn to-day behind the left wing of the Second Army, which is to push on past Amiens, some six miles to the south.

We are quartered in the huts of an enormous camp which was partly artillery workshops, partly dump for a thousand different things, and partly prisoners' camp. There are new guns of the latest type, masses of gun-parts, valuable brass fittings, cables, electro-motors, axles, wheels, gun-carriages, and everything you can think of, standing about in such colossal quantities that one runs amazed and staring from one to the other just as if it were an exhibition.

Under normal conditions wealth does not attract such attention, but when even the rottenest hut has brass hinges and latches, when every electric-light switch is entirely composed of brass, when one sees depots of thousands of pairs of rubber trench-boots, piles of rubber tyres, a pyramid of iron nails of every sort (while with us a packet of nails is a rarity, to be indented for in writing in the most elaborate way), when one sees bath-houses with enormous rubber baths and so on, then one realizes the difference between poverty and privations and wealth. I got an impression that the English made everything either out of rubber or brass, because these were the two materials which we had not seen for the longest time.

At every cross-roads there are little towers of machine-gun



ammunition which anyone can reach. Anybody who needs ammunition can take a box. Why not? Who would steal or carry off machine-gun ammunition, or take it for himself if others needed it? Although lots of material has fallen into our hands, there seems, nevertheless, to have been time to get the most valuable away. Only the enormous plenty which was there makes the residue still seem unnaturally great.

From a point in the neighbourhood one can see Amiens Cathedral. The fighting has been awful. In the church at Raincourt English and Germans are still lying locked in death. The number of dead horses which have still not been cleared away surpassed all imagination, and gives some idea of the loss in human lives. I only hope victory will not drive us to death.

The difficulties of reinforcement are now beginning. Our former camp for details is fifty to sixty miles behind us, and the new camp has not yet been chosen.

#### BEAUCOURT CHÂTEAU, NEAR MOREUIL (ARVE),

March 31, 1918

Piety and neglect. Holy water from Lourdes, relics, and thousands of little pictures of Christ were what these people like better than cleanliness and comfort. Sanitary appliances were apparently not sufficiently holy to be favoured, for there is nothing that resembles them in the whole château. Presumably Mademoiselle de Riencourt, who kept a collection of confession tickets from Paris in her chest-of-drawers as proof of her piety, was in the habit of taking a daily walk in the park. After that she used to have a lesson from the Abbé de Cormont. She kept a note-book on the subject, in which is written *inter alia*: *L'eau bénite.—Ses effets.—L'eau bénite chasse les démons, soulage les malades, attire la grâce de Dieu, remet et efface les péchés véniels. Les chrétiens des premiers siècles faisaient un fréquent usage de l'eau bénite. Nous devons recourir aussi fréquemment à ce sacramental puisqu'il nous offre de si précieux avantages*, etc.

All this water has been collected from many different places and stands about in little bottles. Unfortunately it is of no



good to us, and the *précieux avantages*, even where they do become felt, will not be for the likes of us.

BEAUCOURT, *March 31, 1918*

The atmosphere of neglect of this French château can be felt and smelt like an odour even through the terrible filth and mess which has been spread through it owing to the successive use of the building by French, English, and finally German H.Q. French and English officers' names still stand under my own on the door of the room where I sleep at night on a bare mattress, and we all share one kitchen. One can hardly move in the hall for dead and wounded, the steps are littered with straw and hay, left by the soldiers who have carried it up to the attics to make beds for themselves there. The French guns are sending their shells whistling flat over the roof, but they still go too high. Most of them land as "duds" in the mud of the park, where horses and wagons stand in the wet. Endless columns of transport move backwards and forwards. Men, dispatch-riders, cars, guns, and stretchers appear inextricably mixed up together, but in the end most of them find their right place; the cooks reach their companies, the ammunition gets to the batteries, the wounded are brought to the dressing-station, though maybe they are dead by the time they get attended to. The horses are having a good time; there is oats and hay in abundance everywhere. But for that the bivouacs would be fatal on these cold nights.

There is no help for the wounded horses. Hundreds of horse-trains would be needed, and this would burden the lines of communication more than would be justified. The result is that one sees hundreds of dead horses about, dumb reproaches to human folly, whereas dead men, once buried, make no complaints.

Undoubtedly if the statesmen and politicians of all countries, who count for anything and have any word in affairs, could have taken part in this progress through the desert and stopped here for a while in this most recent devastation, if they could bear the privations in the dirt and blood and have

to sit tight under constant fire from in front and above, none of them would be against peace. Any peace would be good enough for them. But as it is they sit at their conference tables and regard it almost as a scandal that the armies cannot succeed in advancing on all the fronts together.

We have now got French troops in front of us as well as English. One can tell that from the systematic direction of the artillery and the bombardment of vital points behind the line. The English never do that. Our divisions are much thinned, but the enemy must have had unusually heavy losses. Captured English officers complain bitterly of the complete failure of their Staff work. They say, moreover, that, in spite of their recommendations that the troops should be trained for open warfare, their G.H.Q. refused to do so on the ground that it was unnecessary. They represent the confusion as something awful, and it is true that we have intercepted wireless messages in which the G.H.Q. asks whither it is to send reinforcements. Meanwhile our own divisions are out of breath for the time being, and the troops are looting into the bargain, as they suddenly become aware of their long privations.

*April 2, 1918*

One cannot go on victoriously for ever without ammunition or any sort of reinforcements. Behind us lies the wilderness. It is true that the railway is running again as far as Péronne, but it has too many demands to meet.

The above-mentioned confession certificates of Mademoiselle Marie de Riencourt meet one in every drawer, like some distinctive and ever-recurring odour. This "Miss Nothingcourt" kept regular accounts as regards her soul. Presumably she hopes one day to present these receipts to her God in case the accounts in His books do not tally. I have an idea that she entertains some doubts about the accuracy of the Almighty's book-keeping and business management.

The thing which annoys and upsets us here again and again are the exaggerations of the newspapers and the telegrams to crowned heads about the decisive victory, and the words—

the same old words. The same may be said of the premature decorations. Nobody grudges Hindenburg the Blücher Cross, but the proper occasion on which to confer it would have been after the capture of Amiens. The Crown Prince becomes Colonel of a famous regiment, and in this connection the hope is expressed that the regiment will at all times prove itself worthy of its exalted commander. It does not appear to be recognized that the appointment imposes a corresponding obligation on him.

BEAUCOURT, *April 4, 1918*

The hardships are very great. One does not think about them, because it is natural that they should exist and that they should be insignificant compared with the greatness of the issue—if, indeed, wars are to be considered great things. The private who lies day and night in the mud in the open, waiting for a shell or an air-bomb to blow him to bits, is worse off than I am, but I can only speak for myself.

Imagine a series of stinking rooms which yesterday or the day before were a château. The wind and rain come in at the windows, in which fragments of glass tinkle at every shell-burst. The walls tremble all day and all night. When the heavy shells are seeking out their mark by degrees and draw nearer the men run to the cellar. There is no room there for us officers and we go on working. Stretcher-cases get smothered there in the darkness of the night by others who are trying to get shelter. The place stinks of blood, sweat, urine, excrement, iodoform, and wet clothes. Down below in the passages they peel potatoes, but nobody thinks of throwing away the peel; one puts down the wounded on top of it. The house rings day and night with cries of pain, but with craven and selfish demands as well. The numbers of dead on the lawn of the park steadily increase, while the scum of the army stand round and stare at them with revolting curiosity. In the corner there is a man digging graves without ceasing.

A single shell lays out ten horses at once under the trees. They are not removed; they would be just as much in the

way anywhere else. No sooner have thirty wounded been evacuated than there are fifty more in their place. The hospital in the church has had 631 entries in one day and there is one surgeon. Of course, there are other hospitals just as full. All rations and ammunition have to be brought up from Péronne, twenty miles away. All wounded, damaged guns, and transport trains have to be sent back there or even farther. We have had no fresh meat for a week; only one or two chickens serve to supply the illusion that chicken-broth was invented to stay one's hunger on in war-time. The wells have been exhausted or defiled through the carelessness of the men. One or two sheep and cattle which might have been some use had they been properly slaughtered get butchered anyhow as if there were thousands of them. It is impossible to keep a room or any sort of shelter or bed-place clean because there is no water, no brooms, nor even the most primitive utensil available. Chairs and cupboards are broken up to light fires; we have no other fuel, and when this is used up there is nothing left. By the light of a guttering tallow candle two officers are writing reports and orders which will settle the fate of thousands of others, possibly our own. My bed is as hard as a board; when I get up from it I feel more of a wreck than when I lay down, but by changing my position I try to pretend that I am getting rest.

Our division has not struck it lucky. It is ours which has had the heavy fighting on the heights to the north of Moreuil, which are mentioned in the reports. We can make no progress here. Even the fresh divisions do no better. The slippery ground is against us; for every step forward one slides back two, and the ground rises all the way.

I suppose the march and the fighting through the devastated zone were really harder work, but we were fresher then and we had a retreating enemy in front of us. I can still find no word nor image to express the awfulness of that waste. There is nothing like it on earth, nor can be. A desert is always a desert; but a desert which tells you all the time that it used not to be a desert is appalling. That is the tale which is told

by the dumb, black stumps of the shattered trees which still stick up where there used to be villages. They were completely flayed by the splinters of the bursting shells, and they stand there like corpses upright. Not a blade of green anywhere round. The layer of soil which once covered the loose chalk is now buried underneath it. Thousands of shells have brought the stones to the surface and smothered the earth with its own entrails. There are miles upon miles of flat, empty, broken, and tumbled stone-quarry, utterly purposeless and useless, in the middle of which stand groups of these blackened stumps of dead trees, poisoned oases, killed for ever.

This area ought to remain as it is. No road, no well, no settlement ought to be made there, and every ruler, leading statesmen, or president of a republic ought to be brought to see it, instead of swearing an oath on the Constitution, henceforth and for ever. Then there would be no more wars.

BEAUCOURT CHÂTEAU, *April 9, 1918*

Last night the shells set the château on fire. There was a fearful to-do. In the dark rooms of the ground-floor people stumbled over the wounded and the dead without distinction. There were yells of pain from those who were trampled on, and yells of fear from those who thought they were going to be. Everything that had legs ran some way out into the park. It proved possible to put the fire out, so two hours later the rooms were occupied again in a worse state of disorder and ruin than ever. The weather is ghastly, otherwise the glare of the burning château would have given the enemy a splendid target.

Man and beast now wallow in the mud day and night. Perhaps the mud at least holds some warmth. There was a time when we laughed at Cadorna, the Italian Commander-in-Chief, because he reported that his offensive was held up by bad weather. Now it is the case with us. Machine-guns which are buried in mud every time a shell bursts near them cannot shoot; men whose feet are clogged in it cannot charge.

To-morrow we leave the Rencourt château for quieter



quarters. Our losses are too heavy. The total fighting strength of our three infantry regiments is at the moment about six hundred, and some of our batteries are incapable of movement.

ENGLISH HUTMENTS AT AIZECOURT-LE-BAS, *April 12, 1918*

Found my trunk again, which is an unheard-of treat. After cleaning myself by stages in the big blue salad-bowl I realize that, so far as my memory goes, I have not had a complete wash for twenty-five days. I am wearing low boots for a change, and feel passably indifferent to my long-suffering riding-boots. We are to spend some time here. The camp lies in the middle of the wilderness which we crossed in our advance. If the weather remains as bad as it threatens to do, it will be a dreary spell. For the moment there are some deceptive rays of sun, and there is a touch of spring in the air. A woebegone apple-tree is even trying to blossom beside my hut in spite of the ruins, but it looks as if it did not know why it was blossoming.

*April 16, 1918*

[ These English corrugated-iron huts (there is no such thing as wood in the neighbourhood) make horrible quarters. A low roof of corrugated iron, rounded like a tunnel, rests right on the ground, and is closed at either end by thin scantling, in which there is a door on one side and a window on the other. Ours smells of the bad cigars which two of our officers cannot forgo, and of the soot and smoke which an iron stove adds to the reek. In the cold of the early morning the tin cools off to below the inside temperature. This produces a disgusting damp chill, which makes us feel for hours as if we were in an ice-machine, until the servants come and light the fire again with some sort of stinking coal-dust.

AISECOURT-LE-BAS, *April 19, 1918*

It is practically certain that the reason why we did not reach Amiens was the looting at Albert and Moreuil. The

same thing happened in both places ; in Albert I saw it myself. The two places, which were captured fairly easily, contained so much wine that the divisions, which ought properly to have marched through them, lay about unfit to fight in the rooms and cellars. This was quite unforeseen ; no other troops had been ordered to follow up, with the result that the enemy gained fresh footing. The halt gave just time for French artillery to be brought up from the south. The imprudence, together with hunger, thirst, and the general sense of years of privation, were simply too great and too overpowering. The disorder of the troops at these two places, which has been fully attested by German officers, must have cost us a good fifty thousand men, apart from the lost opportunity, for the troops which moved out of Albert next day cheered with wine and in victorious spirits were mown down straight away on the railway-embankment by a few English machine-guns, while those who escaped were laid out by French artillery in their next attack.

The evacuation of the Ypres Salient, which is now to be forced to make up for it, is nothing compared with the loss of Amiens. We were within a hair's-breadth of getting there. We have found French Army orders which foresaw the complete separation of the British Army from the French, and contained provision "in case touch with the British troops is still maintained."

The madness, stupidity, and indiscipline of the German soldier is shown in other things as well. They destroy everything useful, even absolute necessities, and first and foremost things which serve for the common good. This is enough to make anyone meditate. Whereas "the common good" is the phrase which they profess to know best, the appalling fact remains that any huts, houses, tents, or similarly useful objects which have once been used by German troops are done for. The English had been forced to abandon completely untouched a magnificent waterworks at Templeux-la-Fosse, with a system of pipes as thick as your arm. As I passed by the spot during the advance in the rear of the fighting-line the reservoir

was full, the motor was intact, and clean water squirted from all the brass taps. A few days ago, after the division had been withdrawn from the line, I passed Templeux-la-Fosse again on our way back through the wilderness, and looked forward hopefully to reaching this oasis. This time the reservoir-tank was overturned, the motor had been stolen, the brass taps had all been screwed off, or knocked off, or torn off, and all the villages round about, all our quarters, were without water. In every hut some fist has been deliberately thrust through each window, and even though they are only made of oiled paper they cannot be replaced for the time. Any useless toy or trifle they seize and load into their packs, anything useful which they cannot carry away they destroy. In face of this conduct one is inclined to believe that only flogging will help, but our weak social conscience considers the hide of these conscienceless fellows so important that it may not even be tanned.

AIZECOURT-LE-BAS, *April 22, 1918*

All the hardships of the offensive have not worn me out so much as these weeks of nominal rest. The cramped and dirty quarters in the middle of this wilderness, the constant company of two men, one of whom is so naïve that he cannot realize that one needs one's own thoughts to keep alive, the insomnia from which I have suffered ever since I arrived here, and the conviction that no one—not even the others—can really return to the normal in this state of internal and external derangement: all this produces in me a load of nervousness which I am unable to stifle. Moreover, the weather remains bleak, stormy, and unfriendly; the “sunny land of France” is evidently an invention of some irritated Englishman. The news both from the front and the rear is equally scarce. The one certainty is that we are not advancing, while the threat of an American Army gathers like a thunder-cloud in the rear of our other enemies.

Of course, the feeling of superiority which our troops have felt since March 21st is worth an army in itself. All the same,

victory lies only with fresh troops, who are really rested and who are fortified by fresh underwear, good boots, clean rifles, overhauled guns, and properly rested officers. The physical exhaustion of the infantry during the period from April 4th to 10th, not until the end of which was a cessation of the fighting considered necessary here at the Front, was so great that finally the men could hardly fire their rifles; they let themselves be slowly wiped out by the enemy's artillery fire almost without caring, and would hardly move from the spot. They were just like used-up horses which stand fast in the shafts and dumbly take the blows of the whip without a movement. They could not advance; they could not shoot; they could not even get out of the way of the fire; they just stuck there.

Probably it was the same with the enemy, but when two opposing forces are entirely exhausted it is a matter of indifference whether the generalship on one side is abler than on the other. They are equally ineffective; both weapons are equally blunt.

*April 27, 1918*

Orders to move to the Front. For the Staff the change means practically nothing. Our new quarters, like the old, will be in English huts. Corrugated iron is the same everywhere; also the discomfort. Only the visits from enemy airmen will be more frequent, and we shall come in for the heavy artillery fire.

Our third passage through the wilderness, which I have now described more than once, only increases its effect of dreariness. It makes one shake one's head; this sort of wilderness remains incomprehensible. Everything still remains unchanged. Most of the dead horses have had their skins removed, but they decay where they lie. Innumerable tanks stand about like broken-down elephants. Only the dead men have been buried. But it will be months before the area can be completely cleared up, and it will be weeks before we get our reinforcements regularly.

## ENGLISH HUTMENT-CAMP ABOVE THE SOMME VALLEY,

May 3, 1918

Been for a ride through the Somme Valley, half for pleasure and half for reconnaissance. This is a cheerful river, fast and clear. Every now and then it divides into branches, or opens out into a broad, irregular bed in which the chalk gleams white. A number of prettily sited villages (Bray, Suzanne, etc.) make the valley attractive; but as soon as one comes out on to the bare chalk downs one meets the dreariness of the great barren stretches of shell-ploughed country once again. The ground is as hard as iron; weedy grass, weedy elms and osiers, standing in little irregular patches, give the country a particular character which resembles nothing which we have at home. The English have not touched the country. One or two fields are ploughed, but the greater part lie fallow. The innumerable hutment-camps prove that they neither sought nor found any quarters for their troops in the villages. In spite of evident attempts at order and cleanliness these camps are not free from dirt, and lice seem to be as much at home with the Briton as with the Frenchman.

One comes to dislike French ways more than ever. I have preserved a report from the *Matin* of April 23, 1918, on the death of Richthofen. In order to do him a hypocritical justice it drags him into the mud. There is nothing extraordinary in the fact that they defend their country bravely, to the extent of sacrificing their sons. Even the bees do that if one robs their hive. It is difficult to say which behaves more despicably—the nation or the Government, the Press or the professors, the men or the women. I have recently seen a set of pictures, supposed to be original photographs and representing German atrocities. They were a series of crude representations of mutilations, executions of innocent people, old men and invalids, the hanging of priests in churches, the burning of babies in straw, the robbing of churchyards, etc. It would be impossible for anything of the sort to be produced in Germany or England, in Sweden or Denmark. In any case, it would not be allowed to circulate. In France one buys it on the boulevards,



and the country is no more ashamed of its production than a pig is of his manure.

This is the way in which the *Matin* of April 23, 1918, informs its readers of the death of Richthofen:—

### DEATH OF A FAMOUS GERMAN AIRMAN

Freiherr von Richthofen, Commander of the Squadron of the "Red Pirates," has been shot down in the neighbourhood of Amiens.

*(From our War Correspondent with the English Army)*

*April 22nd*

The famous German airman, the elder Richthofen, has been shot down near Amiens; how, it is not yet known. This will be a deadly blow to German pride. In it we see a just retribution.

Squadron No. 11—the Squadron of the "Red Pirates"—which the titled Cavalry-Captain commanded, did not belong to that sort of German airmen which goes out like barbarians at night to murder women and children. On the contrary, his deeds gave proof of a certain *noblesse* and some inkling of gentlemanly feeling. Only the conspicuously gaudy colours of his 'planes, which were painted blood-red with the somewhat childish idea of frightening his opponents, betrayed his barbaric tastes and the height of his ambition.

At the very moment when our men were picking up the bloody remains of the titled Captain the German wireless was publishing with gross satisfaction the news of his 79th and 80th victories. And to-day he will be buried. To the accompaniment of a salvo of German shells his body will be laid in the cemetery at Amiens, in the soil of our gasping, undelivered France.

### RICHTHOFEN THE FIRST

Cavalry-Captain Freiherr von Richthofen made his appearance in the arena of air-fighting soon after the death of Bölcke, who was formerly the first among the famous German airmen. Bölcke was killed at the end of October 1916. On January 24,

1917, the German *communiqué* suddenly reported the seventeenth victory of Freiherr von Richthofen, whose title gave a certain distinction to his squadron, which was almost exclusively composed of commoners. He quickly passed from one honour to another. His victories were on everybody's lips. During the last year Richthofen I (so-called to distinguish him from his brother, Richthofen II) commanded the famous Tango Squadron, which was constantly at war with our squadron of *Cigognes*.

Cavalry-Captain Freiherr von Richthofen never worked alone. No doubt he deserves praise; but he owes his reputation entirely to the tactics of his squadron, which were to fall together upon one or two Allied aeroplanes. In a duel with a Guynemer, a Ball, a Fonck, or a McCuddle, Richthofen would certainly have been beaten.

The number of his victories was deliberately exaggerated, either with the object of increasing the popularity of the Air Force in Germany or of impressing the neutrals with the idea that the Boche air-chasers were superior to those of the Entente. A number of the machines shot down by his unit were attributed to Richthofen. At times every 'plane brought down by the Richthofen group, which comprised about fifty pilots, was written down in the usual German manner to the account of the titled Cavalry-Captain.

Accordingly it is not to be wondered at that, when he was wounded last December, he already counted sixty-one air-victories.

Lieutenant Hans Müller (? Max Müller, already killed), to whom thirty-eight victories are ascribed, will be Richthofen's successor. It is hardly likely that the Boches will be satisfied with so small a number. We shall see that, according to custom, they will give him the benefit of other people's successes.

Translation certified correct.

VON SÖNGTEN,  
*Captain and Intelligence Officer,*  
*General Headquarters.*

May 5, 1918

I am going home for a fortnight. I am suffering from an unaccountable irritation of the nerves of the skin, which is very troublesome. Tiny blisters appear, now here, now there, at the nervous extremities. They cause considerable pain, and call for better surroundings, baths, and cleanliness.

CONDÉ, June 1, 1918

I find my quarters in a little old-fashioned town, the old walls and gates of which enclose a certain degree of recently acquired wealth. Both we and the men have clean billets. We are surrounded by well-tended gardens, and the densely shaded little promenades in and around the town-moat. Magnificent stables, extravagantly equipped, give proof of a certain degree of tranquillity. The little town knows nothing of the War. Before I arrived an official social intercourse had already been established with the hospital sisters, who unfortunately are not distinguished for their beauty. A certain amount of humour is displayed on both sides. It was apparently opened by a duet between the elderly Mother Superior on one side and our little Excellency on the other, and excites the junior lieutenants to ecstasy and twilight promenades.

Men and horses are gradually getting into better shape—or one pretends so. It may be true of the men; the horses look like caged rabbits, soft and no good for work, though the grooms love that sort of thing.

CONDÉ, June 14, 1918

Our period of rest is nearly over. The preparations are not so elaborate and energetic as they were before the spring offensive of this year. It cannot be done. I am still short of five hundred horses if the guns and transport are to have anything like full teams, and those which I have got do not get over-treated with the little sharp yellow grain which ought to be their real food. All the same, there are signs that the division is again to be used for a big undertaking. It is impossible to feel as much confidence as at the beginning of the

year. There will certainly be no surprise. Spies, agents, and deserters are giving the enemy more information than ever. It is true that agents reported our plan in the spring, but over yonder they did not believe it. Now, after the most unlikely things have proved to be true, they will credit us with anything.

Grateful though we are for the clean billets here, nobody seriously regrets leaving. The little old fortress, with its face to Belgium, is all very charming as a place to rest in, but the life is too petty, literally walled up in a corner untouched by the War. A live man cannot stand that. The Staff officers spooned freely with the sisters of the War Hospital, but I did not find them either pretty or amusing enough. They all seemed to have fairly good grounds for having joined a sisterhood. They read nothing but trash, and quoted Wilhelm Tell on every occasion to show their education and to destroy the illusion that they were mere girls. They did this so ostentatiously that they succeeded in losing even this good quality. We learned all this on one occasion, when they were hungry and we invited them to dinner, for naturally some of them wanted to put their hunger to good use. But after a polite pretence at conversation on an educated basis the enthusiasm on our side waned. I like simple girls if they will remain simple girls, but when they quote Tell and indulge in educated conversation the charm goes.

When I am riding alone in the early morning, or lying awake in the light summer night, and find everything wonderful, I realize deep down in me the change which the War alone can have brought about. The fact that it makes so much seem ridiculous and useless, that it has brought us hardships and the power to endure them, that it makes so much seem small, and that it justifies its existence, even as a most frightful monster, will change us all. That is what I hope for.

*June 16, 1918*

We are getting rid of a watery Protestant Divisional padre, who goes to be Chaplain to the Army. I would not record

this fact if it were not symptomatic. Stupidity is a qualification for office; that appears to be fixed as an axiom for the future. In the present case we may be thankful for it. Now I am applying to the Senior Protestant Chaplain for that splendid fellow Nikolassen for our division. He is the man about whom I wrote such good things when he came to see me about his dead son. I have inquired about him amongst the troops, for it is no good giving the sheep a shepherd against their will. But they all like him, particularly because he goes up into the front line with the stretcher-bearers to look after the wounded. That counts a lot with them.

That does not prevent our former padre, whom now with God's help we are getting rid of, from spending every minute of his time running round to emphasize the fact that he has not yet got the Iron Cross (First Class). Other divisional padres, so he says, have already got it. Sometimes one wishes one were a bootblack.

*June 19, 1918*

There are some curious situations. The division is crying out for horses and needs them badly. Army H.Q. is shirking its obligation to provide us with animals, and shoving it off on to other formations to which the division is to be attached. At the same time it counts on making a good raid on the horses sent back to its veterinary hospital on account of sores, by sticking to them when they are well (in itself a very reasonable, general measure, for which there is authority). This means one has to be as sharp with them as if they were horse-copers. Sometimes it is quite amusing. I have had the good luck to wangle three hundred horses out of these Army H.Q., though they still owe me two hundred. As the Army needs men just as I need horses I have got something valuable to bargain with which I can use with a clear conscience. The men in question are those who, in accordance with a decree of the Ministry of War (good in intention but bad in effect), may not be used in the front line. These "blood sacrifices," as they significantly call themselves, although others



are the sacrifice and they are spared, are not on any account to be brought under fire, not even to be allowed near it in charge of a cooker. "I am a blood sacrifice," they tell you, when you ask why they are hanging back. These are the folk whom I now trade for horses; by an exchange of values which is awful enough to consider I get three good beasts for every man.

CHARLEVILLE, *June 27, 1918*

The War is not, after all, in such a hurry with us as it seemed from our sudden departure from the little back-area fortress and its innocence. Our journey lasted half a day and a whole night, but did not take us far. Wanton and adventurous spirits already saw us in Italy and occupying Venice, but, taking it all round, it would not have been a hopeful sign if it had been found necessary once again to stuff the ribs of the Austrian skeleton with German divisions, all on account of the surrender of 12,000 Austrians. So we turned first to the east, but then decidedly to the south, and ended our journey in the valley of the Meuse, still far away from the Front. For the time being it is being given out that the offensive will not come off for some time. Meanwhile the horses are forgetting how to eat oats, because there are none available, which seems to me significant.

The country is beautiful. The many windings of the river, the wooded heights with their châteaux, which are sensible and not too wildly romantic in appearance, the glorious meadows down beside the stream, in which one first cheerfully breaks into a gallop, then soon drops back ruefully into a walk at the thought of one's hungry mount—all these are calculated to make one feel appreciative, to stand still and admire. Hurrying on from one fresh point to another one follows the valley now in its bottom, now on the hills above, and feels in a mood to enjoy life in quite an aimless way. Then all of a sudden everything seems out of tune, and one rides home discontented, unwilling to believe that it is all true, for fear of seeming to ask too much of life.

CHARLEVILLE, *June 29, 1918*

Since yesterday the horses of the division have had no oats. It depresses me. Among other things I am responsible for seeing that the draught horses are serviceable. To keep up the fiction of a hard ration they are now offered two pounds of dried chopped turnips. All other nourishment they are supposed to get from grazing, and that is to go on until the day of the offensive. As if one could suddenly stoke up a horse's body like a boiler. The shortage of horses is bad enough; but the shortage of fodder! I heard a few interesting details on that matter yesterday from the Veterinary Inspector of the Quarter-Master-General. The Entente has four and a half million horses at the Front, while we have only one and a half. They have all the horses in the world, and more or less all the fodder at their disposal; all the help that we can get, after every sort of urgent request, is a miserably five thousand horses from Austria. Where the fodder is to come from nobody yet knows. The Entente uses up 45,000 monthly; our consumption is correspondingly less, but at the same time about as much in proportion—namely, one-third.

When we advance we are to leave all our baggage behind. All very well; that can be endured. But we shall also have to leave guns behind, ammunition-wagons, and so on. This will reduce our artillery strength by about a quarter. It would not be safe to let the infantry know that.

All the same, everybody hopes for the best. I should do so, too, if I did not see these flaws in the reckoning. Three gun batteries (though counted as four), reduced ammunition quota, and horses without oats in their bellies to haul these guns. It is a different tale from four-gun batteries, unlimited ammunition, and teams of six horses bursting with oats. That was what used to be considered the right allowance; and now four Ukrainian blind-worms with grass in their bellies are to do the same work.

No more riding either for the likes of us; no one will find his fortune in that any more. The only horses in this town which show any decent coat and muscle are the racehorses of

the German Crown Prince. I do not say that the oats of which they deprive other horses would win the war. All the same, there is no need to have twelve thoroughbreds, as sleek as eels and bursting with oats, running around under fine woollen blankets, with smart grooms in uniform, while an artillery horse gets a ration of two pounds of chopped turnip a day! The unnecessary thick black dust scattered by the Crown Prince's cars as they tear about the town, almost always empty and to no apparent purpose, is unfortunately not thick enough to cover up all that goes on at these Headquarters and shoves itself offensively under our noses. I ask myself why I am ashamed that, at a time when everything is at stake, the Crown Prince should keep a monkey; yes, yes, a real big monkey, which sits on a chair in the riding-school and screams out its demands at the section of cavalry N.C.O.'s when it gets bored. Then everybody laughs. I ask why I am ashamed and not the Crown Prince.

CHARLEVILLE *July 1, 1918*

In order to prevent peace-time memories from growing dim we have had (besides all manner of less ostentatious business) a parade of all the infantry of the division before the German Crown Prince imposed upon us; and that set a whole lot of people in a greater state of excitement than much more important things. The presenting of arms looked like the movements of a centipede, while the march-past reminded one of the trickling of a winding brook through a green meadow. The weather was fine, and the whole business was delightfully ridiculous and absurd, since there was nothing to be made of it as a spectacle either of war or of peace. The Crown Prince was in good form, and apparently made a good impression on the men. They could not see the big flashy rings on his fingers, and such things do not mean anything to them. He has got an easy, affable way with him, and no sign of embarrassment. He appears deliberately to cultivate this talent for getting on with people.

On closer attention one notices and misses all sorts of things. His friend Z. is certainly a damned nice fellow, who makes himself responsible for decent horses, if not for other decencies. It ought, however, to have been possible for him to get the Crown Prince to combine with that some feeling and inclination for higher values, but I shall never forget that fellow's words. He is one of the very straightest and best, and he probably carries a desire deep in his heart which he has sacrificed along with himself to his friendship. Sadly he confessed: "I don't know what I'm doing here. I'm little better than a Court jester." Among those in attendance on the Crown Prince there was an Oberpräsident von M., who made a good impression and who is reported by the military household to be a coming man. But it is easy to excel where practically the only distinctions are medals. It is almost sufficient to be in the train of the Crown Prince to count as a coming man; all in all, the designation is simply degrading and illusory.

There was not a cloud in the sky for yesterday's play, but the storm in the world is slowly gathering. Here and there, every now and then, down comes a cloud which hides armed men behind it, piles itself up with others in the night, and then lies still until one day it will burst with other clouds in a hurricane. Everywhere the atmosphere is close, charged, electric. One can see more or less the direction which the piles of cloud are taking. Very slowly in the darkness they draw near to other piles, and watch carefully that nothing shall disturb the calm, that not a breath shall stir, nor a shot be fired.

This may last for a long time. Anyway, we are ready. Everything that is possible we have done. The quarters are becoming worse and worse; we shall end up again soon in mud and trenches.

Yesterday I finished *Le Feu*, by Barbusse. The book has no really great message. There are several chapters which have obviously been stuck in in order to cover every phase in the life of an infantry section and now just help to fill the book, loading the story with ineffective passages which strike one as unreal. The real kernel of the book is in the chapters towards



the end, "Le Feu," "Le Poste," "Secours," "La Virée," and particularly "La Corvée." These passages show reality and penetration, in addition to which they have considerable value in the poetic sense. The rest is all arabesques, and as such not so much composed as interposed. I even find his representation of *La Grande Colère* unsatisfying. But the above-mentioned chapters are striking even in French, and are written in powerful language. One thing is true: this is so far the first book which gives expression to the violent feelings which the War has evoked in human beings, as distinct from vicarious emotions. This writer is exempt from vicarious sensations. This is far from being the case, for example, with Unruh, even in his best work. In Unruh's *Before the Decision* the characters are soldiers of past wars speaking the language of this one. Barbusse's men, on the contrary, are creatures of the war itself. That is what is great about the book.

CHAMPAGNE (CAMP IN THE WOODS), *July 10, 1918*

We are still far away from the point of the Front at which we are to attack. We are slowly feeling our way. We know now that we are not to run behind after others, but to go first. At the moment we are sitting in a wood full of strawberries. I have never seen so many strawberries together as there are hereabout. They are the very small kind, smelling and tasting like sweet earth. The camp stands among weedy birch and pine-trees, or rather its little block-houses are half let into the earth, so as to make them invisible to airmen and not easy to see from the level. You do not notice the roof and the entrance-hole until you are right on top of them.

We are now breathing the everlasting dust which the War throws up over this chalky country. Right into the great open woods the foliage is as white as if it had been powdered with lime. At night a cloud of dust hangs over the roads, and pours to right and left into the woods and fields. Even in the morning it still shows what the darkness of the night covered.

The barrenness of this country and its poverty in water can be felt every day and every hour. The horses will not



touch the miserable dusty grass. Every morning and evening they go an hour's journey away under cover of darkness to the river to drink. It is true there is a well, but at the well there is a man posted who demands written authority (!) for every bucket of water which he draws. And we are to win in the face of such difficulties as these, which certainly do not exist on the enemy's side.

*July 12, 1918*

If we can reach the sea before the Americans can reach the land we shall have struck the decisive blow. To capture Paris itself would not be sufficient. The atmosphere about us remains charged; it is as if the tension in each one of us could not be high enough. Nevertheless, I do not count on either England or America giving up the War; they have no need to. It is silly to calculate otherwise, and to build hopes on the U-boats, on a victory over the English Army in France, or anything else. All that cannot help towards a conclusion with those two.

CHAMPAGNE (HUTMENTS IN THE WOOD), *July 14, 1918*

To-night is the fateful one. It looks as if the enemy suspected nothing, but that is hardly credible. The dust-clouds over the roads, which mark the path of the troops and transport even in the morning, would alone be sufficient to give us away. We move late in the evening, and between one and two o'clock hell breaks loose. The preparations for this hell consisted mainly of paper: the road to it was paved with paper. If we fire off as much ammunition at the enemy as we had paper fired at us he will have a bad time.

As all the preparations were made in slow time, the horses and transport-trains have stood the marches fairly well, although they had no oats. The heavy guns are in position; wherever there was a hitch horses were lent and borrowed.

My own prospects for to-morrow are bad and full of responsibility. I am being used as liaison officer with the division on our flank. Generally speaking this means that one

gets badly treated, so far as one will stand it, and has to put up with being ridden over roughshod. One gets shoved anywhere, because one does not belong to the division and has to shift for oneself.

BIVOUAC AMONG BRUSHWOOD, *July 16, 1918*

I have lived through the most disheartening day of the whole War, though it was by no means the most dangerous. This wilderness of chalk is not very big, but it seems endless when one gets held up in it, and we are held up. Under a merciless sun, which set the air quivering in a dance of heat, and sent wave after hot wave up from the grilling soil, the treeless, waterless chalk downs lay devoid of all colour, like stones at white-heat. No shade, no paths, not even roads; just crumbling white streaks on a flat plate. Across this wind rusty snakes of barbed wire. Into this the French deliberately lured us. They put up no resistance in front; they had neither infantry nor artillery in this forward battle-zone, the full use and value of which they had learned from Ludendorff. Our guns bombarded empty trenches; our gas-shells gassed empty artillery positions; only in little hidden folds of the ground, sparsely distributed, lay machine-gun posts, like lice in the seams and folds of a garment, to give the attacking force a warm reception. The barrage, which was to have preceded and protected it, went right on somewhere over the enemy's rear positions, while in front the first real line of resistance was not yet carried.

After uninterrupted fighting from five o'clock in the morning until the night, smothered all the time with carefully directed fire, we only succeeded in advancing about three kilometres in the direction of the high-lying Roman road, which traverses the whole fighting front like a cross-beam.

The Staff of our left flanking division, to which I was attached for the day, had not expected resistance, and moved forward close behind the attacking troops. After riding and wandering between endless barbed-wire entanglements, being hung up and having to walk round mountains of chalk-

rubble, I found it with great difficulty posted in a chalk-trench which, like everything else, was easily visible with an ordinary telescope from the Roman road. The use of the position as the command-post of an important headquarters was made still more evident by the runners and officers approaching it, but in order to save no trouble to make it as dangerous as possible they had gone to the length of putting up a heliograph-station on the very edge of the trench. From it there flashed without ceasing brilliant helio-signals more powerful than the sun, intended for our artillery. Not content with this, the signal-apparatus, which was served by infantry soldiers, was set up, so to speak, like a target, for immediately behind the dark figures and their tripod was a white hill of chalk thrown up from the trench and exposed to the full glare of the sun.

The result of this performance was that in less than half an hour the enemy had found the range with his guns and was putting shells nearer and nearer. A few minutes later there was a direct hit full into the trench. I saw what was coming. I drew the attention of the G.O.C. division, von R., to the absurd exposure of the position. I was actually standing beside him, and had just stepped back to make room for one of his officers, when a shell burst between the two of them. Both were badly wounded. The A.D.C. bled to death in a few minutes; he had saved my life.

I was simply mad. How could one be expected to put one's heart into such a business? It was no courage to behave as these people did; at the most it could amuse a few irresponsibles who were prepared to gamble with their own and other peoples' lives.

But there was worse to follow. All the telephone-wires were cut, shot to pieces or broken by our own guns and transport; consequently the division received no reports from the Front. Instead of sending out a lieutenant or two the G.O.C. division himself must needs be seized with a fit of impatience and false courage and go off on foot, taking the G.S.O.1 with him. They ran about like that for hours, unattainable by anybody. No orders could be carried out, and none was given. Fiercer

and fiercer grew the inquiries after the responsible officers. All inquiries and all reports had to be sent on elsewhere at hazard. One could feel the panic of troops deserted by their Commanders gradually growing. When eventually the officers returned from their tour, on which they had been started by a false appreciation of the situation, they were so tired out that they were of no use for the rest of the day. They never realized what they had done and what risks they had run.

Meanwhile in the whole area in which we were kept confined by the enemy's fire and our own helplessness neither man nor beast had had anything to eat or drink. When at the end of the day I tried to find my own division again, I found myself leading my horse by the bridle with my eyes on the ground, dead-beat and half-asleep.

The achievements of all the other divisions in this sector were on the same scale. We did not see a single dead Frenchman, let alone a captured gun or machine-gun, and we had suffered heavy losses. On one of the chalk-hills I saw an artillery ammunition-column which had all its horses killed. What it was doing up there nobody knows, for not even the guns had got so far. The drivers hadn't had the sense to turn round when they found they had come too far. They just stood there in view of the enemy, as if they were bewitched or spell-bound, until the damage was done.

Everything seemed to go wrong. My own work was useless. None of my reports had reached the G.S.O.1 of the division. I found our H.Q. again in the evening, thanks to a marvellous instinct for direction combined with pure chance. I walked beside my horse, wondering whether there was any remedy for human folly, and came to the conclusion that there would be none so long as the human race lasted.

Late in the evening friend and foe were alike so exhausted that they left one another alone. I lay down in the mud under Lüttich's belly. My face was burning as if it had been sprinkled with pepper. At last, late at night, the ration-cart arrived. I got my servant to pull me out a bottle of wine and drank it at one draught where I lay, although I did my best to go slow.

My body sucked up the moisture so greedily that I felt heavy in every limb. I spent the night in that uncertain sort of drowse which so often takes me. All the others slept like logs.

July 17, 1918

I spent the night before last in a dug-out twenty-eight steps down below the earth, where I was half-devoured by the fleas, which are all over the place here, so last night I brought what remained of my body up to the surface.

To look up into the slowly darkling sky excites rather than calms the nerves. For a long time I lay awake. The shells dreed their weird over my head. When I saw their flash I knew when to expect the report. Then they began to search for the batteries behind the little wood in which I had made my bed and crashed with a wild roar. But so long as they were in the air it was really a pleasure to listen. Eventually I went off to sleep without realizing why; high-pitched sounds in the air are as good a lullaby as a lark's song.

The sun in this part of the country sucks even more out of us than the vermin. Every now and then, to prove to oneself that one's tongue has not stuck to one's gums, one spits out a little spittle, which looks like little wads of cotton-wool. The one and only well has been pumped dry.

July 19, 1918

Since our experiences of July 16th I know that we are finished. My thoughts oppress me. How are we to recover ourselves? *Kultur*, as it will be known after the War, will be of no use; mankind itself will probably be of still less use. We must get away out of ourselves, away from folly, away from delusion, from stupidity, shallowness, lower pleasures, and from the commonplace.

TO THE WEST OF RHEIMS, July 25, 1918

The confusion and blunders are increasing. We are now looking at Rheims from the west. The country is more attrac-



tive, an upland rising to fairly considerable heights, with woods, valleys, and deserted vineyards. We have been spending uncomfortable days in crowded ruined villages, in which we were thrown hither and thither without plan, disturbed day and night by bombardment and bombing from somewhere or other. To-day everything seems to be at a standstill. I do not believe that we shall ever get our hands free again. The American Army is there—a million strong. That is too much.

*Same date*

The last movement of H.Q. I did on horseback, since it is no pleasure to drive in a car on these roads. I passed through the region to the north of Rheims. It evokes nothing but a strange new horror. In this soil, from which one flees if one has any feeling, men have been cooped up for years, fighting for it with their life-blood, as if it were some unheard-of treasure, and now it extends parched, barren, and dreary in the sun and dust, like a scene from hell, by which one has to pass because there is no other way. One meets no human being for hours together. The horses lasted the distance well. At last we came upon water here in a canal. Lüttich was picketed in an unmown field of oats, where he ate his belly full.

*July 27, 1918*

Although worse things happen every day in this War than the ruin of already damaged villages, such things, nevertheless, make one sick at heart. This afternoon the pretty little town, which we were abandoning in our retreat and which we were practically the last unit to leave, was turned over to be looted almost as if by previous arrangement. In the twinkling of an eye everything was turned upside-down, as if the looters were professionals. Nothing was really turned to any use. The soldiers hacked whole beds to pieces for the sake of a length of sheeting the size of a towel and worth about one-fiftieth of their value; thousands of sheets of paper were thrown into the mud for the sake of a single picture postcard, and whole

cupboards burst open for the sake of a reel of cotton. The safes, which, of course, were empty, were peppered with bullets in the hope of breaking them open. There was not very much to be had, but in the end nearly everything was carried off. You could see men with four sunshades under their arm, others carrying a dozen plates. It is certain that in both cases the loot will be lying smashed in the mud by to-night.

*July 30, 1918*

Owing to our inability to defend ourselves the attacks from the air are becoming a great plague for the slowly retreating troops, even for H.Q. itself. At midday yesterday thirty big aeroplanes, nicely escorted by enemy fighting-planes, and nicely left alone by the German airmen, gave us a regular hail of bombs. The poor horses suffered particularly heavily, since they can neither throw themselves flat nor climb trees. The whistling of the falling bombs was like the noise of a thousand door-keys used to hiss a bad play. The explosions followed by hundreds so rapidly that it sounded as if it were hailing red-hot iron bars, of 50 lb. weight each. On explosion they burst into millions of splinters, which flew out horizontally and caused hundreds of casualties. At night the airmen illuminate the spot where their heavy bombs are to be dropped by means of magnesium parachutes, which light up the place for five minutes at a time. The roof-tiles rattle, and at every explosion the whole house in which I lie gives a bang as if it had jumped several inches into the air. As it is no safer in the cellar than anywhere else, I lie in my camp-bed and read your letters which came yesterday once again.

Mankind has always made war on one another for something silly. In the Trojan War it was for a slut of a woman; in other wars it was because one god was supposed to be better than another. In the Middle Ages the manhood of the West went to its death for the sake of an empty tomb which the Turks possessed. And now the whole world of our enemies pretends that they have got to liberate us. From what and from whom?

*July 31, 1918*

Since the flight into the cellars caused by the bombardment of the night before last, during which big R., our Excellency, and myself are said to have been the only ones who stayed upstairs, it was decided last night to evacuate Jonchery, which in other respects is a nice place. Now we have found an ample resting-place on a hill-side overlooking Rheims in a simply magnificent airy dug-out which some English H.Q. had built for it. The exits and living-rooms face the wrong way, i.e. in the direction of the enemy's guns, but the whole place is covered over and rendered invisible by a wonderful net, into which bits of rag and foliage have been woven; if they do shoot one can disappear almost into the bowels of the earth. There is one room above another, with the real refuge right at the bottom. The dusty ruins of Hermonville lie in the valley below us, and far behind them the cathedral of Rheims gleaming white in the midday sun. Our regiments are slowly retiring on to the new line.

*August 4, 1918*

The troops have now been entirely withdrawn from the sector which we have just left. It was evacuated almost without loss; the enemy who followed on our heels had none either.

I have got a bad opinion of the situation; but when I express it I find that people shut their minds rather than their ears to what I say. The German officer cannot realize that things are as they are. Here are the indications. Everybody is tired of the war. One hears men say, "Why not give them this b——y Alsace-Lorraine?" (This from men who are by no means the worst, even from the stoutest fighting-men.) Their manhood has been sapped in such a way that there is no stiffening it. Our division is one of the few possible exceptions. Carelessness and callousness are spreading like plagues. One feels that the year from which for the first time one seriously hoped for a decision, because there was no holding out any longer, has been simply thrown away. At home they are impotent. The brains of all the great men who signed the

manifesto of "The League of Loyalty" (*Bund der Kaisertreuen*) represent all together no more than the brain of an eloquent idiot. And then there is the endless self-delusion. Certainly the same thing may be seen with the enemy, but that does not make things any better for the human race or for ourselves.

One keeps on repeating that there is no sense in using oneself up. One repeats, too, that one is not there to go on being used up in this never-ending folly, whether one rots in a damp dug-out or whether one lies dry. I have no more to do with the theory that one is bound to go on sharing in the folly of the human race because one belongs to it. I do not feel that I am to blame because mankind behaves as it does; it is its fault, not mine.

Here is the stupidest war of position starting afresh. It is necessary because it is forced upon us, and from the military point of view it may yet prove justified; in the end it may lead to something which can be called peace. But I am not convinced that it is reasonable for me personally, and therefore I feel it is unreasonable for me to go on.

CHÂLONS-LE-VERGEUR, *August 12, 1918*

I have been having extraordinary attacks of fever, with such general neuralgia that I can only manage to exist in an artificial condition of tottering weakness with the help of aspirin and pyramidon. This was followed by a nasty attack of champagne-fever, something like typhoid, with ghastly symptoms of intestinal poisoning which laid me out. I'm simply collapsing. Even so, we all (officers as well as men, be it said) have to eat bread that is as damp as a bath-sponge. The cooking is done with a so-called butter which is as old and rancid as war-fever, and, to finish up with, we dig green potatoes out of the fields—not new potatoes, but green October roots. So when once you have got it this diet makes quite certain that you will not get rid of it.

On top of that there is insomnia. The enemy appears to shoot all day and all night long. To-day they were considerate enough to fire practically nothing except "duds" over our

heads into a swamp—hundreds of them in the same place. But even if they do not bang they moan all the way until their end, and one is never sure that some shell will not side-slip and smash up our poor huts or bodies. Even so, one is so insensible that one waits for them to hit one on the head before moving out of the way. We have acquired the philosophy of a louse—to sit tight as long as possible.

*August 12th, Evening*

A lot of officers and men have just gone on leave and thought that they had earned it, and here we are being hauled out again to be shoved in just where it is warmest. I shudder to think of going through the Somme wilderness for the fourth time. It will be the same all over again, but without any confidence. Our troops will be thinner and worse; for days the horses have not had a grain of oats; the men are being given barley-bread which will not rise in the oven, and we have taken some knocks. Against us we shall have thousands of tanks, tens of thousands of airmen, hundreds of thousands of hearty young men, behind whom there will be an American Army which may number a million. I can see and feel mysterious powers rising out of the deep which are not governed by any man's brain but by uncontrollable movements and forces.

Perhaps it is the privilege of helpless humanity to save itself in this way. Perhaps not we but others will go down. Last night I dreamed I saw the Kaiser entering what seemed to be the gateway of a camp, bareheaded and on foot, forced by his people to give himself up to their mercy. I don't know whether he ended on the scaffold, but I should not be surprised.

There are some things I do not want to go through again. Not because I am afraid of them, but because I have seen them before and do not want to experience them twice. I have seen too much in these last days—signs and tokens.

In the end, even if an individual nation does not get its deserts, humanity will. This generation has no future, and



deserves none. Anyone who belongs to it lives no more. It is almost a consolation to realize this. All that an individual can do to get out of the wrack is to find some way of hewing out blocks of stone wherewith to found a new structure which to this generation will be nothing, and leave it as a legacy to others.

*August 17, 1918*

I am in the grip of the fever. Some days I am quite free; then again a weakness overcomes me so that I can barely drag myself in a cold perspiration on to my bed and blankets. Then pain, so that I don't know whether I am alive or dead. I can neither eat nor drink, and yet have constantly a bitter taste in my mouth from thirst. My bowels suddenly revolt as though I were poisoned, then subside again, but the weakness lasts. So it has been going on for weeks.

*August 19, 1918*

We are being moved eastwards and sent into the line again; not at a warm spot, after all—at least so far as we can see at present. Still, the only rest the troops have had has been hardship. The quarters were nothing but tents and shelters, holes in the earth and bare boards. Lice and fleas exhaust us, and the nearest delousing-plant is out of reach on the other side of the wilderness round Rheims. The little light-railways are no help. In addition to that the rations are getting worse. No potatoes, bread made almost exclusively of barley-meal, and in short quantity; last but not least, the local fever.

Personally I have been sick since August 1st, and am as limp as a rag. All the same, I do not want to chuck up just now. Although there is nothing much to do at present I have never felt myself so ill since the beginning of the War. As often as I get the chance I collapse on to the folding-bed, which I fortunately had brought away from the château at Beaucourt, where the French are now again, but I can never get enough rest.

CAMP ON THE AISNE CANAL, *August 21, 1918*

A day or two ago I went for a walk with big R. on a little island which lies opposite our camp in a branch of the Aisne. I said to him: "If anybody wanted to make a good but light-hearted bet he would lay odds that the Hohenzollerns will have to abdicate." The big fellow shrugged his shoulders: "May be right," he said dryly.

*August 25, 1918*

Six hours of shivering, a temperature of  $102^{\circ}$ , then hours of perspiration till I was so weak that I could not move a limb without help, and all my nerves were in commotion. My pulse was racing at 120 to the minute, and I was talking nonsense. One really gets fed up with oneself. In these circumstances the Divisional M.O. insists that I must get away from here as soon as possible. I have got to go to a hospital from which I need not be moved.

RESERVE HOSPITAL, BADEN-BADEN, *September 24, 1918*  
I have been through a bad go of dysentery.

BADEN-BADEN, *November 11, 1918*

The news from the Front about the retreat of my division and the Army was hard to bear. Read side by side with the *communiqués* of the Supreme Command they did not agree. What transformations events do go through from the moment they happen until they appear in the form of the daily bulletin! The reports of my comrades from the Front and during the retreat are scanty, and I suppose this is not yet the time to publish them. I must say that I can watch this disintegration of the Army almost without feeling upset. I had already gone through it all in mind. When it happened I hardly felt it.

All sorts of changes have taken place in the world during the last two days. A curious revolution! So far as the movement in Germany is concerned what surprises me, in spite of the constant talk of violent convulsions, is its superficiality. In the same way, when the sea sends big waves to the shore we

imagine that it is disturbed to its depths, but as a matter of fact it is quite calm down below; all the foam and the momentary violence are merely on the surface. If the Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils imagine that they have given the people the freedom which they want, they are much mistaken. This movement will soon show itself to be the most one-sided régime imaginable and reduce itself *ad absurdum*, after which it will probably give way to some stronger Government. If the present "governments" do any good, so much the better. For the time being (and this is worth a good deal) the Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils at least achieve this much: thanks to a sort of delusion by which they imagine themselves to be immortal they prevent the mob from breaking out in violence. To that I have no objection, but I find all their acts, even their demands, so absurdly superficial, so half-boiled, that I cannot conceive any sort of stability in this form.

I admit that inwardly I cannot feel any great pity for a people which plays at politics with the most serious face in the world at a time when it ought to be reforming itself to its depths. From my sick-bed I can hear the people in the street. The same fellows who marched through the town two nights ago enthusiastically singing the "Wacht am Rhein" were singing to-day a new tune which has been produced for the occasion, "We're going behind the Rhine-line, the Rhine-line, the Rhine-line." It is the same in everything. I won't prophesy that to-morrow they will be cheering their banished Grand Duke, but yesterday they were singing the "Wacht am Rhein," and to-day they're going behind the Rhine-line, the Rhine-line.

What one sees in the hospital here is very characteristic. The one appreciable result of the Soldiers' Councils is that to-day we had no "sweet" for dinner! I am quite overcome. Is that resurrection? Is that revolution?

AT HOME, *November 14, 1918*

My journey home was made through the middle of teeming masses of men in field-grey, who had poured over here from

Alsace, either deserters from the Front or men who had been hanging around behind it for some time. Had to get into the train through the window and out again the same way. I realize that I am not yet quite up to the gymnastic efforts and performances of my youth. I reached my house after midnight with what I should imagine were the last means of conveyance possible.











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